GRACE HARLOWE'S JUNIOR YEAR AT OAKDALE HIGH SCHOOL

Jessie Graham Flower A.M.

CHS-(118)C

Merry Xmas To
Doris
From George Jr.
Dec. 25- 1928

Grace Snatched Off the White Mask.

Frontispiece—High School Girls No. 3.

Grace Harlowe's Junior Year at High School

OR

Fast Friends in the Sororities

By

JESSIE GRAHAM FLOWER, A. M.

Author of Grace Harlowe's Plebe Year at High School, Grace Harlowe's Sophomore Year at High School, Grace Harlowe's Senior Year at High School, etc.

Illustrated

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Grace Harlowe's Junior Year at High School

CHAPTER I

A NEW ARRIVAL

"NEXT to home, there is really nothing quite so satisfying as our dear old High School!" exclaimed Grace Harlowe, as she entered the locker-room and beamed on her three friends who stood near by.

"It does seem good to be back, even though we have had such a perfectly glorious summer," said Jessica Bright. "We are a notch higher, too. We're actually juniors. This locker-room is now our property, although I don't like it as well as the one we had last year."

"We'll get accustomed to it, and it will seem like home inside of two weeks," said Anne Pierson philosophically. "Everything is bound to change in this world, you know. 'We must put ourselves in harmony with the things among which our lot is cast.' "

"Well, Marcus Aurelius, we'll try to accept your teaching," laughed Grace, who immediately recognized the quotation as coming from a tiny "Marcus Aurelius Year Book" that Anne kept in her desk and frequently perused.

"I wonder what school will bring us this year?" mused Nora O'Malley, as she retied her bow for the fifth time before the mirror and critically surveyed the final effect. "We had a stormy enough time last year, goodness knows. Really, girls, it is hard to believe that Miriam Nesbit and Julia Crosby were at one time the banes of our existence. They come next to you three girls with me, now."

"I think that we all feel the same about them," replied Grace. "Miriam is a perfect dear now, and is just as enthusiastic over class matters as we are."

"It looks as though everything were going to be plain sailing this year," said Jessica. "There isn't a disturbing element in the class that I know of. Still, one can never tell."

"Oh, here come Eva Allen and Marian Barber," called Grace delightedly, and rushed over to the newcomers with outstretched hands.

By this time girls began to arrive rapidly, and soon the locker-room hummed with the sound of fresh, young voices. Coats of tan were compared and newly acquired freckles deplored,

as the girls stood about in groups, talking of the delights of the summer vacation just ended.

To the readers of "Grace Harlowe's Plebe Year at High School," and "Grace Harlowe's Sophomore Year at High School," the girl chums have become familiar figures. It will be remembered how Grace Harlowe and her friends, Nora O'Malley and Jessica Bright, during their freshman year, became the firm friend of Anne Pierson, the brilliant young girl who won the freshman prize offered each year to the freshmen by Mrs. Gray. The reader will recall the repeated efforts of Miriam Nesbit, aided by Miss Leece, the algebra teacher, to disgrace Anne in the eyes of the faculty, and the way each attempt was frustrated by Grace Harlowe and her friends. Mrs. Gray's house party, the winter picnic in Upton Wood, and Anne Pierson's struggles to escape her unworthy father all contributed toward making the story stand out in the reader's mind.

In "Grace Harlowe's Sophomore Year," the girl chums were found leading their class in athletics. Here, Miriam Nesbit, still unsubdued, endeavored once more to humiliate Anne Pierson, and to oust Grace from her position as captain of the basketball team, being aided in her plan by Julia Crosby, captain of the junior team, against whom the sophomores had engaged to

play a series of three games. Grace's brave rescue of Julia Crosby during a skating party and the latter's subsequent repentance restored good feeling between the two classes, and the book ended with the final conversion of Miriam after her long and stubbornly nursed enmity.

David Nesbit's trial flight in his aëroplane, Grace's encounter with the escaped lunatic, who imagined himself to be Napoleon Bonaparte, were among the features which made the book absorbing from start to finish.

The clang of the first bell broke in upon the chattering groups, and obedient to its summons, the girls moved slowly out of the locker-room and down the corridor, talking in subdued tones as they strolled toward the study hall.

Miss Thompson stood at her desk, serene and smiling, as the girls filed in.

"How well Miss Thompson looks," whispered Grace to Anne as they neared their seats. "Let's go up and see her when this session is over. It's sure to be short this morning."

It was customary on the opening of school for the members of the various classes to take their seats of the previous year. Then the sections were rearranged, the seniors taking the seats left by the graduates, and the other classes moving up accordingly. The first day of school amounted to really nothing further than being

assigned to one's seat and getting used to the idea of school again. Miss Thompson usually addressed the girls on the duty of High School students, and the girls went forth full of new resolutions that last for at least a week.

Grace looked curiously about her. She wondered if there were to be many new girls that year. The present freshmen, direct from the Grammar Schools, sat on the front seats looking a trifle awed at the idea of being academic pupils, and feeling very strange and uncomfortable under the scrutiny of so many pairs of eyes.

Her glance wandered toward the new sophomore class, as though in search of some one, her eyes brightening as she caught sight of the brown-eyed girl who had won the freshman prize the previous June. The latter looked as helpless and friendless as when Grace first saw her step up on the platform to receive her money. "I shall certainly find out more about that child," she decided. "What is her name? I heard it at commencement, but I have forgotten it."

Taking a leaf from a little note-book that she always carried, Grace wrote: "Do you see the freshman-prize girl over among the sophomores? What is her name? I can't remember." Then, folding the paper, she tossed it to Anne, who

nodded; then wrote, "Mabel Allison," and handed it to the girl sitting opposite her, who obligingly passed it over to Grace.

With a nod of thanks to Anne, Grace glanced at the paper and then at the owner of the name, who sat with her hands meekly folded on her desk, listening to Miss Thompson as though her life depended upon hearing every word that the principal uttered.

"I want all my girls to try particularly this year to reach a higher standard than ever before," Miss Thompson concluded, "not only in your studies, but in your attitude toward one another. Be straightforward and honorable in all your dealings, girls; so that when the day comes for you to receive your diplomas and bid Oakdale High School farewell, you can do so with the proud consciousness that you have been to your schoolmates just what you would have wished them to be to you. I know of no better preparation for a happy life than constant observation of the golden rule.

"And now I hope I shall have no occasion to deliver another lecture during the school year," said the principal, smiling. "There can be no formation of classes to-day, as the bulletins of the various subjects have just been posted, and will undoubtedly undergo some changes. It would be advisable, however, to arrange as

speedily as possible about the subjects you intend to take, as we wish to begin recitations by Friday at the latest, and I dare say the changes made in the schedule will be slight."

Then the work of assigning each class to its particular section of the study hall began. The seniors moved with evident pride into the places reserved for the first class, while the freshmen looked visibly relieved at having any place at all to call their own. Immediately after this the classes were dismissed, and a general rush was made to the end of the great room, where the bulletins were posted.

Grace, Nora, Anne and Jessica wished to recite in the same classes as far as could be arranged, and a lively confab ensued as to what would be best to take. They all decided on solid geometry and English reading, as they could be together for these classes, but the rest was not so easy, for Nora, who loathed history, was obliged to take ancient history to complete her history group, the other girls having wisely completed theirs the previous year. Jessica wanted to take physical geography, Anne rhetoric, and Grace boldly announced a hankering for zoölogy.

"How horrible," shuddered Jessica. "How can you bear to think of cutting up live cats and dogs and angleworms and things."

"Oh, you silly," laughed Grace. "You're thinking of vivisection. I wouldn't cut up anything alive for all the world. The girls did dissect crabs and lobsters, and even rabbits, last year, but they were dead long before they ever reached the zoölogy class."

"Oh," said Jessica, somewhat reassured, "I'm glad to hear that, at any rate."

"That makes three subjects," said Nora. "Now we want one more. Are any of you going to be over ambitious and take five?"

"Not I," responded Grace and Jessica in chorus.

"I shall," said Anne quietly. "I'm going to learn just as much as I can while I have the chance."

"Well," said Jessica, "you're different. Five studies aren't any harder for you than four for us."

"Thank the lady prettily for her high opinion of your ability, Anne," said Grace, laughing. "She really seems to be sincere."

"She's too sincere for comfort," murmured Anne, who hated compliments.

"We haven't settled on that fourth subject yet," interposed Nora.

"Why don't you all take French, it is such a beautiful language," said a soft voice behind them. "I'm sure you'd like it."

The four girls turned simultaneously at the sound of the strange, soft voice, to face a girl whose beauty was almost startling. She was a trifle taller than Grace and beautifully straight and slender. Her hair was jet black and lay on her forehead in little silky rings, while she had the bluest eyes the girls had ever seen. Her features were small and regular, and her skin as creamy as the petal of a magnolia. She stood regarding the astonished girls with a fascinating little smile that was irresistible.

"Please excuse me for breaking in upon you, but I saw you from afar, and you looked awfully good to me." Her clear enunciation made the slang phrase sound like the purest English. "I have just been with your principal in her office. She told me to come here and look over the list of subjects. Do you think me unpardonably rude?" She looked appealingly at the four chums.

"Why, of course not," said Grace promptly, recovering in a measure from her first surprise. "I suppose you are going to enter our school, are you not? Let me introduce you to my friends." She named her three chums in turn, who bowed cordially to the attractive stranger.

"My name is Grace Harlowe. Will you tell me yours?"

"My name is Eleanor Savell," replied the

new-comer, "and I have just come to Oakdale with my aunt. We have leased a quaint old house in the suburbs called 'Heartsease.' My aunt fell quite in love with it, so perhaps we shall stay awhile. We travel most of the time, and I get very tired of it," she concluded with a little pout.

"'Heartsease'?" cried the girls in chorus. "Do you live at 'Heartsease'?"

"Yes," said the stranger curiously. "Is there anything peculiar about it?"

"Oh, no," Grace hastened to reply. "The reason we are interested is because we know the owner of the property, Mrs. Gray, very well."

"Oh, do you know her?" replied Eleanor lightly. "Isn't she a dainty, little, old creature? She looks like a Dresden shepherdess grown old. For an elderly woman, she really is interesting."

"We call her our fairy godmother," said Anne, "and love her so dearly that we never think of her as being old." There had been something about the careless words that jarred upon Anne.

"Oh, I am sure she is all that is delightful," responded Miss Savell, quickly divining that Anne was not pleased at her remark. "I hope to know her better."

"You are lucky to get 'Heartsease,'" said

Grace. "Mrs. Gray has refused over and over again to rent it. It belonged to her favorite brother, who willed it to her when he died. She has always kept it in repair. Even the furniture has not been changed. I have been there with her, and I love every bit of it. I am glad to know that it has a tenant at last."

"Mrs. Gray knew my aunt years ago. They have kept up a correspondence for ever so long. It was due to her that we came here," said Eleanor.

"Is your aunt Miss Margaret Nevin?" asked Anne quietly.

"Why, how did you know her name?" cried Eleanor, apparently mystified. "'This is getting curiouser and curiouser.'"

The four girls laughed merrily.

"Anne is Mrs. Gray's private secretary," explained Jessica. "She tends to all her correspondence. I suppose you have written more than one letter to Miss Savell's aunt, haven't you, Anne?"

"Yes, indeed," replied Anne. "Her name is very familiar to me."

"What class are you girls in?" said Eleanor, abruptly changing the subject. "Or aren't you all in the same class?"

"We are all juniors," laughed Nora, "and proud of it. Our green and callow days are over,

and we have entered into the realm of the upper classes."

"Then I shall enter the junior class, too, for I choose to hob-nob with you girls. Don't say you don't want me, for I have made up my mind; and it is like the laws of the Medes and Persians, unchangeable."

"We shall be glad to welcome a new classmate, of course," responded Grace. "I hope you will soon be one of us. Did Miss Thompson say that you would have to take examinations?"

"She did, she did," answered Eleanor ruefully. "Still I'm not much afraid. I've studied with a tutor, so I'm pretty well up in mathematics and English. I can speak French, German, Italian and Spanish almost as well as English. You know I've lived most of my life abroad. I'll manage to pass somehow."

"I should think you would," exclaimed Anne admiringly. "I hope you pass, I'm sure. Perhaps you'll be too far advanced for our class."

"Never fear, my dear," said Eleanor. "My heart is with the juniors, and leave it to me not to land in any other class. But, really, I've bothered you long enough. I must go back to your principal and announce myself ready to meet my fate. I hope to know you better when examinations have ceased to be a burden and the weary are at rest. That is, if I survive."

With a gay little nod, and a dazzling smile that revealed almost perfect teeth, she walked quickly down the long room and out the door, leaving the girl chums staring after her.

"What an extraordinary girl!" said Jessica. "She acts as though she'd known us all her life, and we never set eyes on her until she marched in and calmly interrupted us ten minutes ago."

"It doesn't seem to make much difference whether or not we like her. She has decided she likes us, and that settles it," said Grace, smiling. "What do you think of her, Anne? You are a pretty good judge of character."

"I don't know yet," replied Anne slowly. "She seems charming. She must be awfully clever, too, to know so many languages, but——"

"But what?" queried Nora.

"Oh, I don't know just what I want to say, only let's proceed slowly with her, then we'll never have anything to regret."

"Come on, girls," said Jessica impatiently. "Let's hurry. You know we promised to meet the boys as soon as school was over."

The girl chums walked out of the study hall, each with her mind so full of the new girl, who had so suddenly appeared in their midst, that the proposed call upon Miss Thompson was entirely forgotten.

CHAPTER II

CONFIDENCES

"I AM the bearer of an invitation," announced Anne Pierson as the four girls collected in one corner of the locker-room during the brief recess allowed each morning.

"Mrs. Gray wishes to see us all at four o'clock this afternoon. We are to dine with her and spend the evening, and the boys are invited for the evening, too. So we will have just time enough after school to go home and dress."

"You had better meet at my house, then," said Grace, "for it's on the way to Mrs. Gray's. Good-bye. Be sure and be there at a quarter of four at the latest."

Promptly at the appointed time the girls hurried up the Harlowe walk. They were met at the door by Grace, who had been standing at the window for the last ten minutes with hat and gloves on, impatiently waiting their arrival.

As they neared Mrs. Gray's beautiful home, Anne said in a low tone to Grace, who was walking with her, "I suppose Mrs. Gray has a double motive in asking us up here to-day. I believe she wants to talk to us about Eleanor Savell. Miss Nevin called on Mrs. Gray yesterday and

they were in the parlor together for a long time. After Miss Nevin had gone, Mrs. Gray told me that Miss Nevin was anxious that Eleanor should associate with girls of her own age. That is the reason she brought her to Oakdale."

"Hurry up, you two," called Nora, who had reached the steps. "How you do lag to-day."

"You will hear more of this later," whispered Anne.

Mrs. Gray stood in the wide hall with hands outstretched in welcome. She kissed each girl affectionately, but her eyes lingered upon Anne, who was plainly her favorite. The old lady had become so accustomed to the sympathetic presence of the quiet, young girl that it seemed, at times, as though her own daughter had come back to her once more.

"Come right into the library and make yourself comfy," cried Mrs. Gray cheerily. "I spend most of my time there. The view from the windows is so beautiful, and as one grows old, one resorts more and more to book friendships."

"What shall we do with you, Mrs. Gray, if you keep on insisting that you are old?" said Grace. "You're not a day older at heart than any of the rest of us. Here, sit down in this nice, easy chair, while we take turns telling you just how young you are."

"It is due to my adopted children that I am

not a cross, crotchety, complaining old woman," said Mrs. Gray, allowing Grace to seat her in the big leather-covered arm chair.

"Now, what does your Majesty crave of her loyal subjects?" inquired Grace, bowing low before the little, old lady.

"Very well, if I am queen, then I must be obeyed. Draw up your chairs and sit in a circle. I want to tell you a little story. That is partly my reason for inviting you here this afternoon, although you know you are welcome whenever you choose to come."

"Is it a fairy story, dear Mrs. Gray, and does it begin with 'Once upon a time'?" queried Jessica.

"It is a story of real life, my child, but I'll begin it like a fairy tale if you wish it."

"Oh, please begin at once," said Grace, who, at eighteen, was as fond of a story as she had been at six.

"Well, 'once upon a time,' there were two sisters. They were really only half sisters, and the one was almost twenty years older than the other. The mother of the elder sister had died when she was about fifteen years of age, and two years later the father had married a beautiful young Irish girl of very good family, who loved him dearly in spite of the difference in their ages.

"After they had been married a little over two years, a little girl came to them, and the older sister loved the tiny baby as dearly as she loved her beautiful, young step-mother."

"Why, that sounds very much like Grimm's fairy tales!" exclaimed Nora. "Only the book people are all kings and queens, but this is even better because the heroine is actually Irish."

There was a general laugh over Nora's remark in which Mrs. Gray joined.

"It's a case of Ireland forever, isn't it Nora?" said Grace teasingly.

" 'Fine and dandy are the Irish,' " said Nora with a grin, quoting from a popular song she had heard in a recent musical comedy. "But stop teasing me, and let Mrs. Gray go on with her story."

"When the baby sister, whose name was Edith, was about three years old, the beautiful young mother died and left the husband inconsolable. A year later he was killed in a railroad accident, and the elder sister, named Margaret, was left with only little Edith to comfort her. The father had been a rich man, so they had no anxiety about money, and lived on year after year in their beautiful old home, with everything heart could wish.

"As Edith grew older, she developed a de-

cided talent for music, and when she was fifteen Margaret decided to take her abroad and allow her to enter one of the great conservatories of Europe. They went to Leipsic, and Edith, who had high hopes of one day becoming a concert pianiste, continued her studies under the best instructors that money could procure. Things ran along smoothly until Edith met a young Italian named Guido Savelli, who was studying the violin at the same conservatory. His brilliant playing had already created a sensation wherever he appeared, and he gave promise of being a virtuoso.

"He fell violently in love with Edith, who had her mother's beautiful blue eyes and the combination of white skin and black hair that go to make an Irish beauty. She returned his love, and after a brief engagement they were married, much against the wishes of Margaret, who thought them both too young and impressionable to know their own minds."

"And did they live happy ever after?" asked Grace eagerly.

"That is the sad part of my story," said Mrs. Gray, sighing. "They were anything but happy. They both had too much of the artistic temperament to live peaceably. Besides, Guido Savelli was thoroughly selfish at heart. Next to himself, his music was the only thing in the

world that he really cared for. When they had been married for about a year and a half he played before the king, and soon became the man of the hour. He neglected his beautiful young wife, who, in spite of their frequent quarrels, loved him with a pure and disinterested affection.

"Finally he went on a concert tour through the principal European cities, and she never saw him again. She wrote him repeatedly, but he never answered her letters, and she was too proud to follow him. She had one child, a baby girl, named Eleanor, who was the sole comfort of the heartbroken mother."

At this juncture Anne and Grace exchanged significant glances.

"When Eleanor was about a year old, the mother wrote Guido Savelli once more, begging him to come to her, if only for the sake of his child, but either he never received the letter or else paid no attention to it, for she received no reply. She relapsed into a dull, apathetic state, from which the repeated efforts of her sister failed to arouse her. The following winter she contracted pneumonia and died, leaving her sister the sole guardian of Eleanor."

"How long ago did all this happen, dear Mrs. Gray?" queried Nora eagerly, "and is little Eleanor living?"

"It was sixteen years ago, my dear," replied Mrs. Gray, "and the reason that I have told you this long tale is because the baby girl is almost a woman now, and——"

"The girl is Eleanor Savell and we met her the other day," broke in Grace excitedly, forgetting for an instant that she had interrupted Mrs. Gray. "She is going to live at 'Heartsease' and—— oh, Mrs. Gray, please pardon me for interrupting you, I was so excited that I didn't realize my own rudeness."

"Granted, my dear," smiled the old lady. "But how did you happen to meet Eleanor? They arrived only a few days ago."

Grace rapidly narrated their meeting and conversation with Eleanor, while Mrs. Gray listened without comment. When Grace repeated Eleanor's remark about having made up her mind, the old lady looked a little troubled. Then her face cleared and she said softly:

"My dear Christmas children, I am very anxious that for her own sake you should become well acquainted with Eleanor. Her aunt was here yesterday, and we had a long talk regarding her. Eleanor is an uncommon girl in many respects. She has remarkable beauty and talent, but she is frightfully self-willed. Her aunt has spoiled her, and realizes too late the damage she has done by having allowed her to grow up

on the continent. They have lived in France, Germany, Italy and Spain, with an occasional visit to America, and Eleanor has always done just as she pleased. For years her aunt has obeyed her slightest whim, but as she grows older she grows more like her father, and her aunt wants her to have some steadying influence that will put a curb on her unconventional tendencies.

"When she wrote me of Eleanor, I wrote her about my girls, and offered her 'Heartsease.' She was delighted with the whole thing and lost no time in getting here. So now you understand why I have told you all this. I want you to promise me that you will do what you can for this motherless girl."

"But we felt sure we should like her when we saw her the other day," said Nora. "She seemed so sweet and winning."

"So she is. She has her father's winning personality, and a good deal of his selfishness, too," replied Mrs. Gray. "You won't find her at all disagreeable. But she is reckless, self-willed, defiant of public opinion and exceedingly impulsive. I look to you girls to keep her out of mischief."

"Well, we'll try, but I never did pride myself on being a first-class reformer," said Grace, laughing.

"Where is her father now?" asked Anne. "Is it possible that he is the great Savelli who toured America two years ago?"

"He is the man," said Mrs. Gray. "He is a wonderful musician. I heard him in New York City. I shall never forget the way he played one of Liszt's 'Hungarian Rhapsodies.' I must caution you, girls, never to mention Eleanor's father to her. She has been kept in absolute ignorance of him. When she is twenty-one her aunt will tell her about him. If she knew he was the great Savelli, she would rush off and join him to-morrow, she is so impulsive. She has the music madness of both father and mother. Her aunt tells me she is a remarkable performer on both violin and piano."

"But why shouldn't she go to her father if he is a great musician?" said Jessica. "And why is she called Savell, if her name is Savelli?"

"Because, my dear, her father has never evinced the slightest desire to look up his own child. Even if he had, he is too irresponsible and too temperamental to assume the care of a girl like Eleanor," Mrs. Gray answered. "No, Eleanor is better off with her aunt. As to her name, her aunt hates everything Italian, so she dropped the 'I' and made the name Savell."

"My," said Nora with a sigh. "She is almost as remarkable as a fairy princess, after all."

"Oh, I don't know," replied Grace quickly. "Her life, of course, has been eventful, but I believe if we are to do her any good we shall just have to act as though she were an every-day girl like the rest of us. If we begin to bow down to her, we shall be obliged to keep it up. Besides, I have an idea that I am as fond of having my own way as she is."

"Dinner is served," announced John, the butler.

The four girls arose and followed Mrs. Gray to the dining room. During the dinner Eleanor was not again mentioned, although she occupied more or less of the four girls' thoughts.

Later on, David, Hippy and Reddy appeared and a merry frolic ensued. It was after ten o'clock before the little party of young folks prepared to take their departure.

"Remember, I rely upon you," whispered Mrs. Gray to Grace as she kissed her good night. Grace nodded sympathetically, but went home with an uneasy feeling that playing the guardian angel to Eleanor would be anything but a light task.

CHAPTER III

AN AUTUMN WALKING EXPEDITION

"IT is simply too lovely to go home to-day," exclaimed Grace Harlowe to her three chums as they strolled down High School Street one sunny afternoon in early October. "I move that we drop our books at my house and go for a walk."

"I'm willing to drop my books anywhere and never see them again," grumbled Nora O'Malley, who was not fond of study.

"I ought to go straight home," demurred Anne Pierson, "but I'll put pleasure before duty and stay with the crowd."

"What about you, Jessica?" asked Grace.

"You couldn't drive me home," replied Jessica promptly.

"Very well," laughed Grace, "as we are all of the same mind, let's shed these books and be off."

After a brief stop at Grace's home, the four girls started out, keenly alive to the beauty of the day. The leaves on the trees were beginning to lose their green and put on their dresses of red and gold. Though the sun shone brightly, the air was cool and bracing, and filled one with

that vigor and joy of living which makes autumn the most delightful season of the year.

Once outside the gate, the chums unconsciously headed in the same direction.

"I believe we all have the same place in mind," laughed Grace. "I was thinking about a walk to the old Omnibus House."

" 'Great minds run in the same channel,' " quoted Jessica.

"I haven't been out there since the spread last year," said Anne.

"I have," said Grace, with a slight shudder. "I am not likely to forget it, either."

"Well we are not apt to meet any more Napoleon Bonapartes out there," said Nora, referring to Grace's encounter with an escaped lunatic, fully narrated in "Grace Harlowe's Sophomore Year at High School."

They were nearing their destination when Anne suddenly exclaimed: "Look, girls. Some one is over at the old house. I just saw a man go around the corner!"

The girls looked quickly in the direction of the house. Just then a figure appeared, stared at the approaching girls and began waving his hat wildly, at the same time doing a sort of war dance.

"It's another lunatic," screamed Jessica. "Run, girls, run!"

"Run nothing," exclaimed Nora. "Don't you know Reddy Brooks when you see him? Just wait until I get near enough to tell him that you mistook him for a lunatic. Hurrah! David and Hippy are with him."

"Well, well, well!" exclaimed Hippy as the girls approached. "Here is Mrs. Harlowe's little girl and some of her juvenile friends. I'm very glad to see so many Oakdale children out to-day."

"How dare you take possession of the very spot we had our eye on?" asked Grace, as she shook hands with David.

"I came over to try my bird before I have it sent home for the winter," replied David. "I was just locking up."

"And the exhibition is all over," cried Grace in a disappointed tone. "I'm so sorry. You see, I still have a hankering for aëroplanes."

"There wasn't any exhibition, after all," said David. "It wouldn't fly worth a cent to-day. I shall have to give it a complete overhauling when I get it back to my workshop. What are you girls doing out this way?"

"Oh, we just came out to walk, because it was too nice to stay indoors," said Anne. "And now we are particularly glad we came."

"Not half as glad as I am," replied David, looking at her with a smile.

"Speaking of walking," remarked Hippy, "I have decided to go in for a little on my own account. Object, to become a light weight. Is there any one who will encourage me in this laudable resolution, and beguile me while I go 'galumphing' over the ground?"

"Oh, I know something that would be perfectly fine!" exclaimed Nora, hopping about in excitement.

"Watch her," cried Hippy. "She is about to have a conniption. She always has them when an idea hits her. I've known her for years and——"

"Make him stop," appealed Nora to David and Reddy, "or I won't tell any of you a single thing."

"I'll desist, merely to please the Irish lady, not because I'm afraid of you two long, slim persons," said Hippy, cleverly dodging both David and Reddy.

"Suppose we go on a walking expedition," said Nora. "We can start early some Saturday morning, with enough lunch to last us all day, and walk to the other side of Upton Wood and back. My sister would be glad to go with us, so that will settle the matter of having an older person along. We can have the whole day in the woods, and the walk will do us all good. We won't have many more chances, either, for

winter will be upon us before we know it. It's a shame to waste such perfect days as these."

"What a perfectly lovely stunt!" exclaimed Grace. "We'll write to Tom Gray, and see if he can't come, too. The walking expedition wouldn't be complete without him."

"I'll write to him to-night," said David. "I certainly should like to see the good old chap."

"Will there be plenty to eat?" asked Hippy. "I always feel hungry after such strenuous exercise as walking. I am not very strong, you know."

"Hear him," jeered Reddy. "One minute he vows to walk until he reaches the skeleton stage, and the next he threatens to kick over all his vows by overeating."

"I didn't say anything about overeating," retorted Hippy. "I merely stated that there are times when I feel the pangs of hunger."

"Stop squabbling," said Jessica, "and let's lay some plans."

"Where shall we lay them?" innocently asked Hippy.

"Nowhere, if you're not good," said Nora eyeing him severely.

Then an animated discussion began, and the following Saturday was agreed upon, the weather permitting, as the best time to go.

Saturday turned out fair, and by nine o'clock

the entire party were monopolizing the Harlowe's veranda.

"Well, are we all ready?" said Tom Gray, as he glanced at his watch. "Everybody scramble. One, two, three, walk."

Eight highly excited boys and girls accompanied by Miss Edith O'Malley, hustled down the steps, waving good-bye to Mrs. Harlowe as she stood on the veranda and watched them out of sight.

The lunch had been divided into four packages and each boy strapped a package to his shoulder. Grace wore a little knapsack fitted to her back with two cross straps. "There's nothing in it but some walnut fudge that I made last night, but I couldn't resist wearing it. It belonged to my grandfather," she confided to the girls when they had exclaimed over it.

"My, but it's great to be here," said Tom Gray to Grace as they entered Upton Wood. "I'm so glad I could come."

"So are we," she replied. "A lark in the woods wouldn't be half the fun with our forester missing."

"Back to nature for me, every time," he exclaimed, taking a deep breath and looking about him, his face aglow with forest worship.

"I love the woods, too," said Grace, "almost enough to wish I were a gypsy."

On down the shady wood road they traveled, sometimes stopping to watch a squirrel or a chipmunk or to knock down a few burrs from the chestnut trees they occasionally found along the way. Once they stopped and played hide and seek for half an hour. By one o'clock they were ravenously hungry. Hippy clamored incessantly for food.

"Let us feed him at once, and have peace," exclaimed Nora. "I'm hungry, too. It seems an age since breakfast."

A halt was made and the contents of two of the lunch packages were arranged on a little tablecloth at the foot of a great oak. The hungry young folks gathered around it and in a short time nothing remained of the lunch excepting the packages reserved for supper.

"I move we all take a half hour's rest and then go on," said David. "We still have a mile to go before we are through the wood. We'll feel more like walking after we've rested a little."

"Let us all sit in a row with our backs against this fallen tree and tell a story," said Grace. "Hippy, you are on the end, so you can begin it, then after you have gone a little way, Nora must take up the narrative, and so on down the line until the story is finished."

"Fine," said Hippy. "Here goes:"

"Once upon a time, in the heart of a deep forest, there lived a most beautiful prince. He had all that heart could wish; still he was not happy, for, alas, he was too fat."

At this statement there was a shout of laughter from his listeners, at which Hippy, pretending anger, glared ferociously and vowed that he would not continue. Nora thereupon took up the narrative and convulsed her hearers with the remedies tried by the fat prince to reduce his weight. Then the story was passed on to Anne. With each narrator it grew funnier, until the party screamed with laughter over the misfortunes of the ill-starred prince.

Hippy ended the tale by marrying the hero to a princess who was a golf fiend and who forced the poor prince to be her caddy.

"From the day of his marriage he chased golf balls," concluded Hippy, "and the habit became so firmly fixed with him that he even rose and chased them in his sleep. He lost flesh at an alarming rate, and three months after his wedding day they laid him to rest in the quiet churchyard, with the touching epitaph over him, 'Things are not what they seem.'"

Hippy buried his face in his handkerchief and sobbed audibly until David and Reddy pounced upon him and he was obliged to forego his lamentations and defend himself.

"It's time to move," said Tom Gray, consulting his watch. "I don't believe we'd better go on through the wood. We'll have to about face if we expect to get home before dark."

So the start back was made, but their progress was slow. A dozen things beguiled them from the path. Tom's trained eye spied a wasp's nest hanging from a limb. It was as large as a Japanese lantern and a beautiful silver-gray color. Anne stopped to pick some ground berries she found nestling under the leaves. Then they all started in wild pursuit of a rabbit, and in consequence had difficulty in finding the road again. Finally they all grew so hungry they sat down and disposed of the remaining food.

"How dark it is growing," exclaimed Jessica, as they again took the road. "It must be very late."

"It's after four o'clock," replied David, "and there's a storm coming, too. I think we had better hurry. I don't fancy being caught in the woods in bad weather. Hustle, everybody."

As they hurried along the path a blast of wind blew full in their faces. The whole forest seemed suddenly astir. There were strange sounds from every direction. The branches creaked and the dry leaves fell rattling to the ground by hundreds. Another gust of wind filled their eyes and nostrils with fine dust.

"Don't be frightened," called Tom. "Follow me."

He led the way with Reddy, but the storm was upon them before they had gone ten steps. The wind almost blew them off their feet and black darkness settled down over the woods. They could just see the outlines of the trees as they staggered on, a blinding rain drenching them to the skin.

Tom divided the party into two sections, four in one and five in the other. They were to hold each other's hands tightly and keep together. Frequent flashes of lightning revealed the woods in a tremendous state of agitation and it seemed better to be moving than to stand still and watch the terrifying spectacle.

On they stumbled, but suddenly came to grief, for the four in front fell headlong over a tree that had been blown across the path, and the other five hearing their cries of warning too late, followed after.

By the time they had picked themselves up the storm had grown so furious that they could only press miserably together and wait for it to pass.

Suddenly Tom amazed them all by putting his hands to his mouth and blowing a strange kind of hollow whistle that sounded like the note of a trumpet.

He repeated the whistle again and again. "You may not believe it," he said between calls, "but the hunter who taught me this, told me never to use it unless I was in dire need. Then help of some sort would surely come. It is called the Elf's Horn."

"Did you ever try it before," asked Reddy curiously.

"No," he answered, "I never did. I suppose it's only superstition, but I love hunter's lore. Perhaps it may work. Who knows?"

"Hello-o-o!" cried a voice seemingly close by. "Hello-o-o!"

"Where are you?" called Tom.

"This way," answered the voice, and a light flashed a little distance off, revealing to them a man waving a lantern with one hand and beckoning with the other. One and all dashed toward the light, feeling that shelter was at hand.

"It must be a hunter," panted Tom, "and he has heard the Elf's Horn."

It was a hunter, and none other than old Jean. Their blind wandering had taken them straight to the hunter's cabin.

"It is Mademoiselle Grace and her friends," cried the old man with delight. "When the sky grow so dark, I take my lantern and go out to my trap I have set this morning. Then I

hear a strange whistle, many times, and I think some one get lost and I cry 'hello,' and you answer and I find mademoiselle and her friends."

"That was the Elf's Horn, Jean," replied Tom, "and you heard because you are a hunter."

"I know not what monsieur mean by Elf Horn, but I hear whistle, anyhow, and come," remarked the old man, smiling.

The others laughed.

"It's a shame to spoil it," replied David, "but I am afraid your Elf's Horn and Jean's helloing were just a coincidence."

"Coincidence or not," replied Tom good-naturedly, "my faith in the fairy horn is now unshakable. I shall use it again if I ever need to."

Before a blazing fire kindled by Jean in the big fireplace, the whole party dried themselves. The old hunter listened to the story of their mad scramble through the woods with many expressions of sympathy.

It was eight o'clock when the storm had abated sufficiently to allow them to sally forth, and in a short time they were in Oakdale.

Fifteen minutes later they were telling Mr. and Mrs. Harlowe just how it all happened.

CHAPTER IV

GRACE MAKES A DISCOVERY

THE Monday after the walking expedition, Grace Harlowe set out for school full of an idea that had been revolving in her busy brain for weeks. The time had come for herself and for her three chums to bind themselves together as a sorority. As charter members, they would initiate four other girls, as soon as proper rites could be thought of. It should be a Greek letter society. Grace thought "Phi Sigma Tau" would sound well. Aside from the social part, their chief object would be to keep a watchful eye open for girls in school who needed assistance of any sort.

Mrs. Gray's anxiety over Eleanor Savell had set the bee in Grace's bonnet buzzing, and now her plans were practically perfected. All that remained to be done was to tell her three friends, and consult them as to what other four girls would be eligible to membership.

Her proposition was hailed with acclamation by Anne, Nora and Jessica. Miriam Nesbit, Marian Barber, Eva Allen and Eleanor Savell were chosen as candidates and promptly notified to report at Jessica's home the next Thursday

evening for initiation. They at once accepted the invitation and solemnly promised to be there.

"'Where are you going, my pretty maid?'" said David Nesbit, stopping directly in front of Grace Harlowe as she hurried toward the Bright home the following Thursday evening.

Grace laughed merrily, dropped a little curtsy and recited, "I'm going to an initiation, sir, she said."

"'And may I go with you, my pretty maid?'" replied David, bowing low.

"No boys allowed there, sir, she said."

"That settles it," sighed David. "I suppose a sorority is about to come to the surface. Am I right, and will you take me along?"

"Yes, we are going to initiate members into our new sorority, but you can't come, so you might as well be resigned to fate," retorted Grace. "We didn't receive invitations to your fraternity initiations."

"Be kind to Anne, won't you. Tell her she has my sympathy," said David solemnly.

"Anne is a charter member, if you please," laughed Grace. "She is spared the ordeals of initiation. But Miriam will not escape so easily. She is one of the candidates."

"Ah, ha!" exclaimed David. "That's what she was so mysterious over. I tried to find

out where she was going, but she wouldn't tell me. By the way, where does the affair take place?" he added, trying to look innocent.

"Don't you wish you knew?" teased Grace. "However, you shan't find out from me. I know too well what would happen if you boys traced us to our lair. But I must go or I shall be late. Good night, David. Please be good and don't follow me. Promise me you won't."

"I never make rash promises," answered David, smiling. "Be merciful to the candidates." Lifting his cap, the young man hurried off and turned the corner without looking back.

"I wonder what I had better do," Grace mused. "I know perfectly well that David Nesbit won't go away. He will wait until he thinks I am far enough up the street and then he'll follow me. As soon as he finds out where I am going he'll rush back and hunt up Hippy Wingate and Reddy Brooks. Goodness knows what the three of them will plan."

She decided to turn down a side street, go back one block and into the public library. She could easily leave the library by the side entrance and cut across Putnam Square. That would mislead David, although no doubt he would find them before the evening was over.

Grace lost no time in putting her plan into action. As she hurried into the library she

looked back, but saw no sign of David. When she reached Putnam Square she almost ran along the broad asphalt walk. It was fifteen minutes past seven by the city hall clock, and she did not wish to be late. The girls had agreed to be there by half past seven. She was almost across the square when her ear caught the sound of a low sob. Grace glanced quickly about. The square was practically deserted, but under one of the great trees, curled up on a bench, was a girl. Without an instant's hesitation Grace made for the bench. She touched the girl on the shoulder and said, "You seem to be in distress. Can I do anything to help you?"

Then Grace gave a little surprised exclamation. The face turned toward her was that of Mabel Allison, the freshman prize girl. The glare from the neighboring light revealed her tear-swollen eyes and quivering lips. She gave Grace one long, agonized look, then dropped her head on her arm and sobbed harder than ever.

"Why, Miss Allison, don't cry so," soothed Grace. "Tell me what your trouble is. Perhaps I can be of some service to you. I've wanted to know you ever since you won the freshman prize last June, and so has Anne Pierson. She won the prize the year before, you know."

The girl nodded, but she could not sufficiently control herself to speak.

Grace stood silently waiting until the other should find her voice. A moment more and Mabel Allison began to speak in a plaintive little voice that went straight to Grace's heart:

"You are Grace Harlowe. I believe every girl in Oakdale High School knows you. I have heard so much about you, but I never dreamed that you'd ever speak to me."

"Nonsense," replied Grace, laughing. "I'm just a girl like yourself. There isn't anything remarkable about me. I'm very glad to know you, Miss Allison, but I am sorry to find you so unhappy. Can't you tell me about it?" she coaxed, sitting down on the bench and slipping one arm around the shabby little figure.

Mabel's lip quivered again. Then she turned impulsively toward Grace and said: "Yes; I will tell you, although no one can help me. I suppose you don't know where I live or anything about me, do you?"

"No," replied Grace, shaking her head, "but I'd be glad to have you tell me."

"Well," continued Mabel, "I'm an orphan, and I live with Miss Brant. She——"

"Not that horrible, miserly Miss Brant who lives in that ugly yellow house on Elm Street?" interrupted Grace in a horrified tone.

"Yes, she is the one I mean," continued Mabel. "She took me from an orphan asylum

two years ago. I hated her the first time I ever saw her, but the matron said I was old enough to work, that I'd have a good home with her and that I should be paid for my work. She promised to send me to school, and I was wild to get a good education, so I went with her. But she is perfectly awful, and I wish I were dead."

Her voice ended almost in a wail.

"I don't blame you," said Grace sympathetically. "She has the reputation of being one of the most hateful women in Oakdale. I am surprised that she even allows you to go to school."

"That's just the trouble," the girl replied, her voice husky. "She's going to take me out of school. I shall be sixteen next month, and exempt from the school law. So she is going to make me stop school and go to work in the silk mill. I worked there all through vacation last summer, and she took every cent of my wages. She took my freshman prize money, too."

"What a burning shame!" exclaimed Grace indignantly. "Haven't you any relatives at all, Miss Allison, or any one else with whom you could stay?"

Mabel shook her head.

"I don't know anything about myself," she

said. "I was picked up on the street in New York City when I was three years old, and as no one claimed me, I was put in an orphanage. There was one woman at the orphanage who was always good to me. She remembered the day they brought me, and she said that I was beautifully dressed. She always believed that I had been stolen. She said that I could tell my name, 'Mabel Isabel Allison,' and that I would be three years old in November, but that I couldn't tell where I lived. Whenever they asked me I cried and said I didn't know. She wanted to save my clothes for me, thinking that by them I might some day find my parents, but the matron took them away from her, all but three little gold baby pins marked 'M. I. A.' She hid them away from the matron. When she heard I was to go with Miss Brant, she kissed me, and gave them to me. She was the only person that ever cared for me."

The tears stood in Grace's eyes.

"You poor, little thing!" she cried. "I care for you, and I'm going to see if I can do something for you. You shan't stop school if I can help it. I can't stay with you any longer, just now, because I am going to Miss Bright's and I am late. It is eight o'clock, you see."

The girl gave a little cry of fright.

"Oh, I didn't think it was so late. I know

Miss Brant will be very angry. She will probably beat me. I am still carrying the marks from the last whipping she gave me. She sent me out on an errand, but I felt as though I must be alone, if only for a few minutes. That's why I stopped in the square."

"Beat you!" exclaimed Grace. "How dare she touch you? Why, I never had a whipping in my life! I won't keep you another minute, but wait for me outside the campus when school is out to-morrow. I wish to talk further with you."

"I'll come," promised Mabel, her face lighting up. "Then she suddenly threw both arms around Grace's neck and said, "I do love you, and I feel that some one cares about me at last." Then, like a flash, she darted across the square and was soon lost to Grace's view.

"Well, of all things!" Grace remarked softly to herself. "I think its high time we organized a sorority for the purpose of aiding girls in distress."

"You're a prompt person. Did you really decide to come?" were the cries that greeted her from the porch as she opened the Bright's gate.

"Save your caustic comments," said Grace as she handed Jessica her hat. "I have a tale to tell."

"Out with it!" was the cry, and the girls sur-

rounded Grace, who began with her meeting with David, and ended with the story of Mabel Allison.

"You haven't heard anything of those boys yet, have you?" she asked when she had finished.

"Not yet," said Nora, "but never fear, the night is yet young."

"Where is Eleanor Savell?" asked Grace, noticing for the first time that Eleanor was not present. "You promised to go for her, didn't you, Anne?"

"I did go," replied Anne, "but she wouldn't come. She said she'd come sometime when she felt like it. She was playing on the violin when the maid let me in, and how she can play! She wanted me to stay there with her and didn't seem to understand why I couldn't break my engagement with you girls. She said that she always kept her engagements unless the spirit moved her to do something else.

"Is Eleanor Savell the girl who comes into the study hall every morning after opening exercises have begun?" asked Marian Barber.

"Yes," Grace answered. "I forgot for a moment that you and Eva and Miriam hadn't met her. She is really very charming, although her ideas about punctuality and school rules are somewhat hazy as yet. She lives at 'Hearts-

ease,' Mrs. Gray's property. I am disappointed because she will not be here to-night. She seemed delighted when I asked her to join our society."

"As long as we know she isn't coming, don't you think we should begin the initiation?" asked Nora. "It is after eight o'clock and we can't stay out too late, you know."

"Very well," said Grace. "Blindfold the candidates."

The three girls meekly submitted to the blindfolding, and the chums were about to lead them to the initiation chamber, when the ringing of the door bell caused them to start.

"It's David and the boys," said Jessica. "Shall I tell them that they can't come in?"

"Of course," responded Nora. "You and Grace go to the door, while Anne and I stay here with our victims. Be careful they don't play you a trick."

The two girls cautiously approached the door, opening it very slowly, and saw—not the three boys—but Eleanor. She smiled serenely and said: "Good evening. I decided, after all, that I would come."

"Come right in," said Jessica cordially. "I am so glad you changed your mind and came. The initiation is about to begin. Have you ever belonged to a secret society?"

"Never," replied Eleanor. "But now that I'm here, I am willing to try it."

"Come this way."

"Girls," said Grace, addressing the three blindfolded girls, "this is Eleanor Savell. You can't see her yet, but you may all shake hands with her. She is to be your companion in misery."

Eleanor laughed, shook hands with the others and graciously allowed Nora to tie a handkerchief over her eyes.

"All ready! March!" called Grace, and the eight girls solemnly proceeded to the initiation chamber.

CHAPTER V

THE PHI SIGMA TAU

AT the door a halt was called.

"Prepare to jump," commanded Grace in a deep voice. "One, two, three! Jump down! Be careful!"

The four candidates gave four uncertain jumps and experienced the disagreeable sensation usually felt in attempting to jump downward when on level ground. This was one of the oldest and mildest forms of initiation, but Nora had insisted upon it, and giggled violently as the four girls prepared for a long leap. Even Grace, who was conducting the ceremony with the utmost seriousness, laughed a little at the picture they made.

"They'll do anything you tell them," whispered Nora. Which was perfectly true. To show fear or reluctance in obeying the demands made upon one, was to prove one's self unworthy of membership in the Phi Sigma Tau.

"Let the music begin," said Grace.

There was a faint snicker as Anne, Nora and Jessica raised three combs, wrapped in tissue paper, to their lips and began the "Merry Widow" waltz, with weird effect.

"You must waltz around the room fifteen times without stopping," continued Grace, "and then sit down in the four opposite corners of the room, on the cushions provided for you."

The girl chums retreated to the doorway of the room, that had previously been cleared of almost all the furniture, to watch the movements of their victims as they endeavored to circle the room the required number of times. They lost their count, bumped each other at every turn, and at last staggered dizzily toward what they thought the corners of the room. Miriam Nesbit made straight for the door in which the chums stood, and Grace was obliged to take her by the shoulders and gently steer her in the opposite direction. Eleanor, after groping along one side of the room for a corner, was the first to find one, and sank with a sigh of relief upon the pile of cushions. The other girls had not been so successful. They all endeavored to sit in the same corner at once, and Grace was obliged to go to the rescue, and lead two of them to opposite sides of the initiation chamber.

"In order to become successful members of this society, it is necessary for you to sing. You may all sing the first verse and the chorus of any song you know, only be sure that you don't choose the same song, and don't stop until you

have finished," directed Grace. "Begin after I have counted three. I will wait for a minute while you choose your song. The orchestra will accompany you."

There was considerable subdued laughter from the orchestra, who had been instructed to play "The Star Spangled Banner," oblivious of whatever the candidates might sing.

"One, two, three!" counted Grace, and the concert began.

Eva Allen chose "John Brown's Body." Miriam Nesbit, "Old Kentucky Home." Marian Barber, "Schooldays," while Eleanor contributed "The Marseillaise" in French. The orchestra dutifully burst forth with "The Star Spangled Banner," and the effect was indescribable.

The orchestra broke down before they reached their chorus, and the accompaniment ended in a shriek of suppressed mirth, but the candidates went stolidly on without a smile and finished almost together.

"Very well done," commended Grace. "I see you will be valuable additions to the society."

The girls were then put through a series of ridiculous tests that the four chums had devised. They were made to dip their hands in water charged with electricity, caress a mechanical rubber snake that wriggled realistic-

ally, drink a cup of boneset tea apiece, and were directed finally to bare their arms for the branding of the letters of the society.

The branding was done with a piece of ice, pressed hard against their bare arms, and the shock made the victims gasp for a second and wonder if they really were being burned.

"You will now hold up your right hands and repeat after me," said Grace, "I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute my duties as a member of the Phi Sigma Tau, and will, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend its laws."

This done, the girls received the grip of the society, the handkerchiefs were removed from their eyes and they were pronounced full-fledged members.

"That oath has a rather familiar sound," remarked Miriam Nesbit, trying to recollect where she had heard it before.

"I know," she said at last. "It's the oath of office taken by the President of the United States at inauguration, only you changed it to suit this sorority."

"You've guessed it exactly," replied Grace. "I chose it because it sounded so much more expressive than to say, 'May my bones be crushed and my heart cut out if ever I am unfaithful to my vows.'"

There was a general laugh at this, the girls agreeing that Grace's choice was infinitely less blood-thirsty.

"Now that you have so bravely endured the trials of initiation, you shall receive your reward," declared Jessica. "Follow me."

She led the way to the dining room, where a bountiful lunch awaited them, to which, after the manner of hungry school girls, they did full justice.

"By the way," said Grace, after they had returned to the sitting room and were comfortably settled, "you never said one word about my freshman prize girl. I thought you would be awfully interested in her. For the benefit of the new members, I will say that this society was organized with a definite object, that of helping others. We are to look after girls who have no one to make things pleasant or happy for them. Why, do you know that there are quite a number of girls attending High School who come from other places, and who have to spend the holidays at their boarding houses without any fun at all? Look at this poor, little Allison girl. She works for her board in the winter, and in the mill in the summer, and now that miserable Miss Brant is going to take her out of school, and she is getting along so well, too."

"Isn't it a pity," said Anne, "that people like her can't understand that if a girl were allowed to finish her education, she could earn so much more in the long run than she could by working year after year in a mill?"

"We might go to Miss Brant and explain that to her," said Nora. "Perhaps she would listen to us."

"I don't believe so," replied Grace. "Besides, she might be very angry and take her spite out on poor Mabel. If we could only get Mabel away from her. But if she has legally adopted her we couldn't do anything. Besides, where would she go if we did get her away?"

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Jessica thoughtfully. "I'll ask papa about it. Lawyers always know everything about such things. Maybe he could find out if Miss Brant has any real claim upon her."

"That's a good idea," said Miriam Nesbit. "If we can get her away from that hateful old wretch, the sorority could adopt her. She could stay with each one of us for a month. That would be eight months, and at the end of that time she would have finished her sophomore year. Then she could get something pleasant to do through the summer vacation. That would give her some money for clothes for next year. Perhaps by that time we could

find some nice people for her to stay with, or if we liked her well enough, we could go on having her with us. I'll ask my mother to-morrow, and you girls might do the same."

"Miriam Nesbit, what a perfectly lovely plan!" exclaimed Grace Harlowe with rapture. "I feel sure mother would let me have her."

"She can come here any time," said Jessica. "Papa allows me to do as I like."

" 'First catch your bird,' " said Nora wisely. "Don't plan too much, until you find out whether you can snatch her from the dragon's claws."

"I feel sure we shall win," replied Grace confidently. "What do you girls think of it?" she asked, turning to Eva, Marian and Eleanor, who had so far expressed no opinion.

"Count us in," said Eva and Marian in a breath.

"And you, Eleanor?" asked Grace.

"She can live at our house forever, if she doesn't disturb me," replied Eleanor lazily. "My aunt won't care, either. When we lived in Spain she used to help every beggar we came across, and Spain is a land of beggars. She never can resist an appeal for charity."

There was a sudden silence. Then Grace said gently, although she felt irritated at Eleanor's careless speech: "I don't think Mabel Allison

could really be called a beggar; and if we adopt her, we ought never to let her think that we consider her a dependent. Of course we know very little about her yet, but I think she will prove worthy. I am to see her to-morrow, and perhaps it would be better to talk a little more with her before we tell Jessica's father about it."

Eleanor looked at Grace with an amused smile.

"How serious you girls are," she said. "Is it school that makes you so? If it is, I don't think I shall stay long. I like to drift along and do only what my inclination prompts me to do. I hate responsibility of any sort."

"Perhaps you will feel differently about school after a while," said Anne quietly. "This is my third year in Oakdale High School, and I never had any good times until I came here. As for responsibility, it is a good thing to learn to be responsible for one's self, if for no one else."

"Well, perhaps you are right, but I am sure that if you had never lived long enough in one country to become acclimated, you wouldn't feel very responsible, either," said Eleanor in such rueful tones that the girls laughed, although they secretly disapproved of Eleanor's inconsequential attitude.

"Did you think the examinations hard?" asked Jessica of Eleanor.

"Oh, no," replied Eleanor lightly. "I had an English governess who was with us for five years. She drilled me thoroughly in English and mathematics. I loathed them both, but studied them merely to show her that I could master them. Miss Thompson said my work was good, and that if I were ambitious she would put me in the senior class, but I held out for the juniors and finally got my own way. If you are going to take such a serious view of of this gay world, however, perhaps I'll wish I had joined the seniors, after all. No, I don't mean that. I'm awfully glad to know you, and feel honored at being a member of your sorority. Only I don't expect to ever be a very useful one. My aunt has spoiled me, and I frankly admit it. So, you see, there is no hope for me." She spread out both hands in a deprecating manner and shrugged her shoulders exactly as a French woman might have done.

"I am sure we like you, just as you are," said Eva Allen warmly. She had been rather impressed with Eleanor.

"Do you see the time?" said Nora, suddenly pointing to the old-fashioned clock in the corner. "Half past ten! I must go this minute. Sister will be worried."

She immediately made for her hat and coat, the others following suit, with the exception of Eleanor, who was to wait until the coachman came for her.

Once the girls were outside the gate, Marian Barber broke out with: "What a queer girl that Eleanor Savell is. She is beautiful and fascinating, but I don't know whether I like her or not."

"You must like her," said Grace. "You know the members of this society must stand by each other."

"But why did you ask her to join, Grace?" persisted Marian. "She is different from the rest of us. I don't believe we shall get along with her very well."

"I'll tell you girls a secret," replied Grace. "Anne and Nora already know it. Mrs. Gray wants us to be nice to Eleanor for a number of reasons, and, of course, we wish to please her. Anne, Jessica, Nora and I were talking about it the other day, and while we were laying plans for this sorority, we decided to ask Eleanor to join. We thought we could learn to know her better, and she would eventually become a good comrade."

"It sounds ridiculous to talk about helping a clever girl like Eleanor, but from her conversation to-night you can see that she needs some

wholesome advice occasionally," said Nora bluntly. "Mrs. Gray seems to think we can be of some use in that direction, so we are trying to carry out her theory."

"I think I understand the situation," said Miriam Nesbit, "and will do all I can to be nice to her, if she doesn't attempt to patronize me. I couldn't stand that. I know I used to do it. I suppose that's why it seems so unendurable to me now."

"David Nesbit didn't disturb us, after all," remarked Eva Allen. "It's a wonder those boys didn't put tick-tacks on the windows or do something like that."

The girls had come to the turn of the street, and were about to pass the only really lonely spot during their walk. It was an old colonial residence, the surrounding grounds extending for a block. It had been untenanted for some time, as the owners were in Europe, although both house and grounds were looked after by a care-taker. On the other side of the street was a field where the small fry of Oakdale usually held their ball games.

"I always hate passing this old house," said Marian Barber. "It is so terribly still back there among those pines. I don't——"

She stopped short, an expression of terror overspreading her good-natured face, as she

mutely pointed toward the old house. Three ghostly figures swathed in white stole out from the shadow of the pines and glided down the wide, graveled drive toward the gate. Their appearance was terrifying. Their faces were white as their robes, and blue flames played about their eyes. They carried out in every particular the description of the regulation churchyard ghost.

For an instant the six girls stood still, regarding those strange apparitions with fascinated terror. Then Eva Allen and Marian Barber shrieked in unison and fled down the street as fast as their legs would carry them. Grace, Nora, Anne and Miriam stood their ground and awaited the oncoming spectres, who halted when they saw that the girls did not intend to run.

"High School boys, on a lark," whispered Grace to her friends. "Let's charge them in a body."

With a bound she reached the drive, closely followed by the other girls. The ghostly three evidently considering discretion the better part of valor, left the drive and took to their heels across the lawn. But Grace, who was well in the lead, caught the last fleeing ghost by its robe and held on for dear life. There was a sound of rending cloth as the apparition

bounded forward, then it caught its spectre toe on a tuft of long grass and fell forward with a decidedly human thud.

The girls surrounded it in an instant. Before it had time to rise, Grace snatched off a white mask smeared around the eye-holes with phosphorus, which explained the flamelike effect, and disclosed the sheepish face of James Gardiner, one of the sophomore class.

"Oh, let a fellow up, will you?" he said, with a sickly grin.

"You bad boy!" exclaimed Grace. "What do you mean by dressing up like this? Don't you know you might frighten some timid person terribly?"

"Initiation," said the youth, with a grin, rising on his elbow and looking as though he would like to make a sudden break for liberty. "Part of the sacred obligations of the 'Knights and Squires' frat. Three fellows of us were initiated to-night. This was the last stunt."

"Well, I suppose under those circumstances we shall have to forgive you. Did you appear to any one else?" asked Grace.

"Only to that old crank Miss Brant. She was scared out of her wits," replied James, laughing. "Two of your crowd got out in a hurry, too, didn't they?"

"I suppose I shall have to confess that they

did," replied Grace. "If I were you, James, I'd take off that costume and hurry away. Miss Brant is liable to inform the police, and they might not look at initiation stunts as we do."

"That's right," said James, looking a trifle alarmed. "Wonder where the fellows went. I'd better put them on. We never thought of that. If you girls will excuse me, I'll hunt them up."

"Certainly," said the girls. "Good night, James."

"Good night," replied the youth. "You girls are all right. Can't scare you." With a nod to them he started across the grass on the run, his ghostly garments trailing behind him.

"I'm glad that wasn't David," said Anne as James disappeared. "I was afraid when first I saw them that they might be our boys. I didn't feel frightened at all, after what Grace had said about meeting David."

"Eva and Marian didn't show any great amount of courage," said Nora, laughing. "I wonder if they ran all the way home."

"There they are ahead of us," said Anne.

True enough, the two girls stood on the corner waiting for the others to come up.

"Why don't you hurry on home?" called Nora. " 'The goblins will git you, ef you don't watch out.' "

"Don't tease," said Marian Barber, looking rather foolish. "We are awfully sorry we ran away, but when I saw those awful white figures coming toward us, I just had to run and so did Eva. Who on earth were they, and where did they go?"

In a few words Grace told her what had happened.

"That horrid James Gardiner. I'll never speak to him again," cried Eva Allen. "I hope he didn't recognize us. He'll tell every one in school about it."

"I don't think he did," replied Grace. "Oh, look, girls! Here comes Officer Donavan! I was right when I said that Miss Brant would notify the police."

"I hope she got a good scare," remarked Nora wickedly. "As for the ghosts, they are very likely at home by this time."

CHAPTER VI

A VISIT TO ELEANOR

THE next day, when Grace, in company with her chums, left the school building, they beheld the shabby little figure of Mabel Allison waiting for them just outside the campus. She looked shy and embarrassed when she saw the four girls bearing down upon her, and seemed half inclined to run away. Grace greeted her cordially and introduced her to her chums, whose simple and unaffected manners soon put her at her ease.

"I am so glad you waited," said Grace cordially. "I have told my three friends about you, as I knew they would be as much interested in you as I am. We have made a plan and if we can carry it out, you will be able to go to school until you graduate."

"You are very good to take so much trouble for me," said Mabel, the tears springing to her eyes; "but I'm afraid it won't do any good."

"Don't be down-hearted," said Nora sympathetically. "You don't know Grace Harlowe. She always does whatever she sets out to do."

"She's a regular fairy godmother," said Anne softly. "I know from experience."

"Such flattery is overwhelming," murmured Grace. "I regret that I'm too busy to bow my thanks. But to get down to the business of the hour—tell me, Mabel, dear—did this Miss Brant legally adopt you when she took you from the orphanage, or are you bound to her in any way?"

"I don't know," said the girl, her eyes growing big with wonder. "I never thought about it. I don't believe, however, that she has any legal claim upon me."

"Is there any way in which you can find out?" asked Anne.

"Why, yes," replied Mabel. "I could write the woman at the orphanage who was good to me. She is still there, and several times she has written to me, but Miss Brant read her letters first and then tore them up. Her name is Mary Stevens, and she would surely know!"

"Then write to her at once," said Grace, "and tell her to send her letter in an outside envelope addressed to me. Your whole future depends upon her answer."

Grace thereupon related to her their conversation of the previous night.

"As soon as you find out about Miss Brant's claim, we shall take the matter to Jessica's father, who is a lawyer. He will help us," Grace concluded. "Then when you are free,

we shall have something else to tell you. Just be patient for a few days, and don't be afraid. Everything will come right."

"How can I ever thank you all?" said Mabel, taking one of Grace's hands between hers and looking at her with a world of gratitude in her eyes. "I will write to-night. I must go now or I shall be home late. Forgive me for hurrying away, but I daren't stay," she added piteously. "You know that I should like to. Good-bye, and thank you again."

"Good-bye," called Grace. "I'll let you know as soon as I hear from Mary Stevens."

"What a sweet little girl she is," said Jessica. "I should like to keep her with me all the time."

"She is a nice child," said Grace, "and she deserves something better than her present fate."

"To change the subject," said Nora, "has any one seen Eleanor to-day? She was not in English or geometry, although she may have come in late."

"I don't believe she was in school at all," said Anne. "Maybe the initiation was too much for her."

"Oh, I don't know. She didn't seem to mind it," remarked Jessica. "She will hear from Miss Thompson if she makes a practice of stay-

ing out of school. Attendance is one of the chief requisites in Miss Thompson's eyes."

"I suppose we ought to call on Eleanor before long," mused Grace. "She has invited us, and it's our duty to call on her first. Anne has already been there. Suppose we go over now; that is, unless you girls have something else to do."

It was decided at once that they could go, and soon the four chums were walking briskly down the street in the direction of "Heartsease." It was an Indian summer day and the girls congratulated themselves on having taken advantage of it. As school had closed at half past two, it was not yet four o'clock. They would have plenty of time for their call without hurrying themselves. So they strolled along, laughing and chatting in the care-free manner that belongs alone to the school girl.

As they neared the house one and all exclaimed at the beauty of the grounds. The lawn looked like a great stretch of green velvet, while the trees were gorgeous in their autumn glory of crimson and gold, with here and there a patch of russet by way of contrast. Over at one side were clumps of pink and white anemones; while all around the house and in the garden beds that dotted the lawn many-colored chrysanthemums stood up in brave array.

"What a delightful place 'Heartsease' is," cried Grace as she paused just inside the gate to feast her eyes upon its beauty. "Sometimes I think that autumn is the finest season of the year, and then again I like spring better."

"What difference does the season make, so long as we have a good time?" said Nora blithely. "I haven't any preference. They're all good."

"Eleanor will be surprised to see us," remarked Grace, as she rang the bell.

"Let's hope she will appreciate the honor of having four such distinguished persons descend upon her at one time," said Anne.

"Is Miss Savell in?" asked Grace to the trim maid who answered her ring.

"Yes, miss," replied the maid. "Come in. Who shall I say is here?"

"Say to Miss Savell that Grace Harlowe and her friends would like to see her."

The maid soon reappeared and led the girls down the wide, old-fashioned hall, and, somewhat to their surprise, ushered them into the dining room, where they beheld Eleanor, arrayed in a dainty white house gown, dining alone.

She arose as they entered and came forward with both hands outstretched.. "How are the Phi Sigma Taus to-day?" she asked. "It was awfully nice of you to come and see me."

"We thought you might be ill," said Nora. "We missed you at school to-day."

"Oh, no," replied Eleanor serenely. "I am perfectly well. I really didn't feel like going to school to-day, so I stayed in bed until eleven o'clock. I am just having lunch now. Won't you join me? I am keeping house by myself this afternoon. My aunt is dining with Mrs. Gray."

"Thank you," said Grace, speaking for the girls. "We all have supper at half past six and must save our appetites for that."

"We usually dine about eight o'clock," said Eleanor. "We acquired the habit of dining late from living on the continent. But, come, now. I have finished my lunch. I want you to see where I live, almost entirely, when in the house."

The girls followed her up the broad staircase and down the hall. Every inch of the ground was familiar to Grace. She had been there so often with Mrs. Gray. "Oh, you have the suite at the back," she exclaimed. "I love those two rooms."

"You will find them somewhat changed," remarked Eleanor as she opened the door and ushered the girls into the most quietly luxurious apartment they had ever seen. Even Miriam Nesbit's room could not compare with it.

"What a beautiful room!" exclaimed Grace, looking about her with delight. "I don't wonder you like to spend your time in it. I see you have your own piano."

"Yes," replied Eleanor. "My aunt sent to New York for it. The one downstairs in the drawing room is all right, but I like to have this one handy, so that I can play whenever the spirit moves me. This is my bedroom," she continued, pushing aside the silken curtains that separated the two rooms. The girls exclaimed over the Circassian walnut furniture and could not decide as to which room was the prettier.

"Eleanor," said Grace solemnly, "you ought to be a very happy girl. You have everything heart can wish. Think of poor little Mabel Allison."

"Oh, don't let's think about disagreeable things," said Eleanor lightly. "Sit down and be comfy and I'll play for you. What shall I play?"

"Do you know the 'Peer Gynt' suite?" asked Grace. "I love 'Anitra's Dance.' "

Without answering, Eleanor immediately began the "Peer Gynt" music and played the entire suite with remarkable expression.

"How well you play!" exclaimed Jessica with eager admiration in her voice, as Eleanor turned

around on the stool after she had finished. "I should love to hear you play on the violin. Anne heard you the other night, and told us about it."

"I love the violin better than the piano, but it sounds better with a piano accompaniment. Don't you girls play?"

"Jessica does," chorused her friends.

"Oh, I never could play, after hearing Eleanor," said Jessica blushing.

"Come on," said Eleanor, taking her by the arm and dragging her over to the piano. "You can accompany me. What do you play?"

"Do you know Raff's 'Cavatina'?" asked Jessica a trifle shyly.

"By heart," answered Eleanor. "I love it. Wait and I'll get the music for you."

After a moment's search she produced the music, picked up her violin, and, after tightening a string, announced herself ready.

The girls listened, spellbound. It seemed as though Eleanor's very soul had entered into the violin. They could not believe that this was the capricious Eleanor of half an hour before.

"Whatever she may do in future," thought Grace, as she listened to the last plaintive notes of the "Cavatina," "I'll forgive her for her music's sake. One has to make allowances for

people like her. It is the claim of the artistic temperament."

"Please play once more," begged Nora. "Then we must go. It's almost six o'clock."

Eleanor chose Nevin's "Venetian Love Song," and Jessica again accompanied her.

"You play with considerable expression," said Eleanor, as Jessica rose from the piano stool.

"How could I help it?" replied Jessica, smiling. "You inspired me."

Eleanor accompanied the four girls down the walk to the gate and repeatedly invited them to come again.

"It's your turn to come and see us now," said Grace. "Do you think you will go to school to-morrow, Eleanor? Miss Thompson dislikes having the girls stay out."

"I can't help what Miss Thompson dislikes," returned Eleanor, laughing. "What I dislike is of more importance to me. I dare say I shall go to-morrow, providing I get up in time."

"What an irresponsible girl Eleanor is," remarked Anne, as they walked along. "I am afraid we can't do much for her. She doesn't seem much interested in school and I don't think she is particularly impressed with our sorority."

"Anne," said Jessica, "you have seen Miss Nevin, her aunt. Tell us how she looks."

"She is tall," replied Anne, "and has beautiful dark eyes. Her hair is very white, but her face looks young, only she has the saddest expression I ever saw on any one's face."

"I should think she would look sad after seventeen years of Eleanor's whims," remarked Nora bluntly. "It would wear me out to be with her continually, she is so changeable."

"Mrs. Gray told me," remarked Anne, "that Miss Nevin's life had been one long sacrifice to the pleasure of others. First her father, then her step-sister and now Eleanor. She was engaged to be married to a young English officer, and he died of fever while stationed in India. So, there is reason for her sad expression."

"I once read, somewhere," said Jessica sentimentally, "that 'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.' "

"Humph!" said Nora. "If I am ever foolish enough to fall in love, I certainly don't want to lose the object of my devotion."

"You can't very well," said Grace slyly, "for from all present indications I should say that he is too fat to get lost."

And Nora was obliged to explain elaborately to the laughing girls, all the way home, that the object of her future devotion would not be a fat man.

CHAPTER VII

THE CLAIM OF THE "ARTISTIC TEMPERAMENT"

WHEN Eleanor returned to school the following morning, she found that what Miss Thompson "disliked" was, after all, of considerable importance. Directly after opening exercises the principal sent for her and asked the reason for her absence of the day before. On finding that Eleanor had no plausible excuse, but had absented herself merely because she felt like it, Miss Thompson thereupon delivered a sharp little lecture on unnecessary absence, informing Eleanor that it was the rule of the school to present a written excuse for absence, and that a verbal excuse would not be accepted.

"I will overlook it this time, Miss Savell," Miss Thompson said, "because you are not as yet thoroughly acquainted with the rules of this school, but do not let it occur again. And I must also insist upon punctuality in future. You have been late a number of times."

With these words the principal turned to her desk and resumed the writing she had been engaged in when Eleanor entered.

For a second, Eleanor stood regarding Miss

Thompson with angry eyes. No one had ever before dared to speak sharply to her. She was about to tell the principal that she was not used to being addressed in that tone, but the words would not come. Something in the elder woman's quiet, resolute face as she sat writing checked the wilful girl, and though she felt deeply incensed at the reprimand, she managed to control herself and walked out of the office with her head held high, vowing to herself that Miss Thompson should pay for what Eleanor termed "her insolence."

All morning she sulked through her classes, and before closing time had managed to incur the displeasure of every teacher to whom she recited.

"What ails her to-day?" whispered Nora to Jessica.

It was geometry hour, and Miss Ames, the geometry teacher, had just reproved Eleanor for inattention.

Nora shook her head. She dared not answer, as Miss Ames was very strict, and she knew that to be caught whispering meant two originals to work out, and Nora hated originals.

When the bell rang at the close of the hour, Eleanor walked haughtily by Miss Ames, giving her a contemptuous look as she passed that made the teacher tighten her lips and look se-

vere. Grace, who was directly behind her, saw both the look and the expression on the teacher's face. She felt worried for Eleanor's sake, because she saw trouble ahead for her unless she changed her tactics. If Eleanor could only understand that she must respect the authority of her various teachers during recitation hours and cheerfully comply with their requests, then all might be well. Since Miss Leece had left the High School at the close of Grace's freshman year, she could not conscientiously say that she disliked any of her teachers. They had been both kind and just, and if Eleanor defied them openly, then she would have to take the consequences. To be sure, Eleanor might refuse to go to school, but Grace had an idea that, lenient as Miss Nevin was with her niece, she would not allow Eleanor to go that far. Grace decided that she would have a talk with Eleanor after school. It would do no harm and it might possibly do some good.

She hurried down to the locker-room that afternoon in order to catch Eleanor as she left school. She had just reached there when Eleanor walked in, looking extremely sulky. She jerked her hat and coat from her locker, hastily donned them, and, without looking at Grace, left the room.

"She looks awfully cross," thought Grace.

"Well, here goes," and she hurried after Eleanor, overtaking her at the entrance to the school grounds.

"What's the matter, Eleanor?" she asked. "Didn't you care to wait for me?"

Eleanor looked at her with lowering brows. "I hate school," she said vehemently. "I hate the teachers, and I hate Miss Thompson most of all. Every one of those teachers are common, low-bred and impertinent. As for your Miss Thompson, she is a self-satisfied prig."

"You must not say such things of Miss Thompson, Eleanor," said Grace firmly. "She doesn't deserve them. She is one of the finest women I have ever known, and she takes a warm interest in every girl in school. What has she done that you should speak of her as you do?"

"She called me into her office this morning and made a whole lot of fuss because I didn't have a written excuse for yesterday's absence," said Eleanor angrily. "When I told her that I stayed at home because I felt inclined to do so, she almost had a spasm, and gave me another lecture then and there, ending up by saying that it must not occur again. I should like to know how she knew I was absent yesterday."

"Miss Thompson always knows when a girl is absent," replied Grace. "The special teachers report to her every day. It is the rule of

this school for a girl to present her excuse at the office as soon as she returns; then her name is taken off the absent list. If she is absent the second day, then a messenger is sent to her home to find out the cause. I suppose that when Miss Thompson looked over the list, she remembered seeing you at opening exercises, so of course sent for you."

"She is a crabbed old maid," said Eleanor contemptuously, "and I despise her. I'll find some way to get even with her, and all the rest of those teachers, too."

"You will never get along in school, Eleanor," answered Grace gently, "if you take that stand. The only way to be happy is to——"

"Please don't preach to me," said Eleanor haughtily. "It is of no use. I am not a child and I understand my own business thoroughly. When I saw you girls the first day of school, I thought that you were full of life and spirit, but really you are all goody-goodies, who allow those teachers to lead you around by the nose. I had intended to ask Aunt Margaret to take me out of this ridiculous school, for some of the people in it make me tired, but I have changed my mind. I shall stay for pure spite and show that stiff-necked principal of yours that I am a law unto myself, and won't stand her interference."

"Stop a moment, Eleanor. I am going no farther with you," said Grace, flushing, "but I should just like to say before I leave you that you are taking the wrong view of things, and you'll find it out sooner or later. I am sorry that you have such a poor opinion of myself and my friends, for we cherish nothing but the friendliest feelings toward you."

With this, Grace walked away, feeling more hurt over Eleanor's rudeness than she cared to show.

As she turned out of High School Street she heard a familiar call, and, glancing up the street, saw her three chums waiting for her on the corner.

"We saw you just as you tackled Eleanor," said Nora, "so we kept away, for we thought after to-day's performances she wouldn't be in a very good humor."

"What was the matter with her to-day?" asked Jessica curiously. "She behaved like a bad child in English this morning, followed it up in geometry; and Anne says that in rhetoric class Miss Chester lost all patience with her and gave her a severe lecturing."

"I might as well tell you at once that Eleanor's opinion of us is far from flattering," said Grace, half laughing, although there was a hurt look on her face. "She says we are all goody-

goodies and that we make her tired. She also requested me to mind my own business."

"She said that to you? Just wait until the next time I see her," blustered Nora, "I'll tell her what I think of her."

"On the contrary, we must treat her better, if anything, than before," said Anne quietly. "Don't you remember we promised Mrs. Gray that we would try to help her?"

"Yes, I remember all that; but I can't bear to have any one say horrid things to Grace," grumbled Nora.

"What a queer girl she is," said Jessica. "Yesterday she treated us as though we were her dearest friends, while to-day she scorns us utterly. It's a case of 'blow hot, blow cold.' "

"That is because she has the artistic temperament," replied Anne, smiling.

"You may say what you like about the artistic temperament," said Nora, "but in my opinion it's nothing more nor less than just plain temper."

CHAPTER VIII

ELEANOR THROWS DOWN THE GAUNTLET

"THE Phi Sigma Tau is to have a special meeting to-night at Jessica's," called Grace Harlowe to Nora O'Malley as the latter entered the locker-room at the close of school one day about two weeks after the initiation at Jessica's.

"Does Jessica know it?" inquired Nora.

"Not yet," replied Grace, "but she will as soon as she comes in. I rushed down here the minute the last bell rang, because I wanted to be here when the girls come in. You are the first, however."

"Why are we to hold a meeting?" asked Nora, her curiosity aroused.

"Wait and see," replied Grace, smiling. "Of what use is it to hold a meeting, if I tell you all the business beforehand?"

"All right," said Nora, "you keep your secrets and I'll keep mine."

"What have you heard that's new?" asked Grace.

"Wait and see," replied Nora, with a grin of delight. "I am saving my news for the meeting."

By this time the remaining members of the Phi Sigma Tau, with the exception of Eleanor Savell, had come into the locker-room, and had been promptly hailed by Grace. Marian Barber, Miriam Nesbit and Eva Allen after agreeing to be at Jessica's, at eight o'clock, had gone their separate ways.

"Every one excepting Eleanor has been told," said Grace. "I really don't know how to approach her. She has been so distant of late."

"Don't wait to ask her," said Nora decidedly. "She won't attend the meeting."

"How do you know?" asked Jessica.

"I'll tell you to-night," answered Nora mysteriously, "but I know positively that she won't come, because she is going to have company at 'Heartsease.' Now I've told you more than I intended to, and I shall not say another word until to-night."

"Come on then," said Grace, "we won't wait any longer. Jessica, will you ask your father if he will be at liberty for a few minutes this evening?"

"Certainly," replied Jessica.

"Oh, I know now whom it's all about," cried Nora gleefully. "Mary Stevens."

"You have guessed it," said Grace, "but, like yourself, I decline to talk until to-night."

Before eight o'clock the seven girls had taken possession of the Bright's big, comfortable sitting room and were impatiently waiting for Grace to tell her news.

"Before I tell you what is on my mind," said Grace, "we ought to have a president, vice president and secretary for this worthy organization. I move therefore that we choose Miriam Nesbit for president of this sorority. Those in favor say 'aye.' We'll dispense with seconding the motion."

There was an instant's pause, then a chorus of "ayes" burst forth.

"Contrary, 'no.' "

The only "no" was from Miriam.

"We appreciate the fact that you are too polite to vote for yourself, Miriam," said Grace, "but your 'no' doesn't amount to a row of pins. You're elected, so come over here and occupy the chair of state. Long live the president of the Phi Sigma Tau."

Miriam, flushed with pleasure, then took the seat that Grace had vacated. She had not expected this honor and was deeply touched by it. Her summer with her girl chums at Lake George had made her an entirely different girl from the Miriam of old. Admiration for Grace and her friends had taken the place of the old animosity. Although the chums had not taken

her into their inner circle, still they made much of her, and she came nearer to being one of them than any other girl in the junior class.

"I am sure I thank you all," began Miriam, "and now we must have a vice president and a secretary."

Grace and Anne were elected with enthusiasm to the respective offices, then Miriam requested Grace to tell the other members what was on her mind.

After addressing the chair, Grace began: "I know you will all be glad to hear that Mabel has received a letter from Mary Stevens. It was addressed to me on the outside envelope and Mabel has given me permission to open and read it to you. She is willing for us to do whatever we think best. I won't attempt to read all the letter, only that part that interests us.

"Here it is: 'I am so sorry about the way in which you are treated, but glad to know that you have found friends at last. Miss Brant has no claim on you whatever. She took you from the orphanage with the understanding that if you did not suit her she was to be allowed to send you back. The matron asked her why she did not adopt you, or at least appoint herself your guardian, and she said that under no circumstances would she do so; that she

wanted a good maid of all work, not a daughter. I enclose a statement from the matron to this effect. I would have advised you before this to leave her, but you are too young to drift about the world alone. I hope that when I next hear from you, you will be in happier surroundings. I have always believed that your parents were people of means and that you were lost or stolen when a baby. Perhaps if they are still living you will find them some day.' "

"That is about all we need," said Grace, as she folded the letter and put it back in the envelope. "The next thing to do is to see Mr. Bright."

"I'll go for him at once," said Jessica, and darted off to the library, where her father sat reading. He rose, and, tucking his daughter's arm in his, walked out to the sitting room, where the Phi Sigma Tau eagerly awaited him.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed, smiling at the circle of girls. "What's all this? Am I invited to be present at a suffragette's meeting or is Jessica simply anxious to show me what nice friends she has?"

"No compliments allowed," laughed Grace. "We wish to ask your advice about something."

"I am at your service," said Jessica's father, making her an elaborate bow. "Command me as you will."

"'Tis well, most reverend sir. I thank you," said Grace, with a curtsy. "Now sit you down, I pray, for presently I have a tale to tell."

Having conducted Mr. Bright with great ceremony to the arm chair in the corner, Grace established him with many low bows, much to the amusement of the girls, with whom Jessica's father was a great favorite. Then Grace began with her meeting with Mabel Allison and ended with the letter from Mary Stevens, enclosing the matron's statement.

"Now, those are all the facts of the case, Mr. Bright," she concluded. "Will it be possible for us to get Mabel away from Miss Brant, or can Miss Brant hold her against her will?"

"Miss Stevens' letter and the matron's statement are sufficient," answered Mr. Bright. "This woman cannot hold your little friend. Miss Brant will in all probability be very angry, and attempt to brave the matter out. Suppose you and Jessica and I go down there together, Grace, and see what we can do?"

"O Mr. Bright!" cried Grace, clasping her hands delightedly, "will you, truly?" Then let's go to-morrow and bring Mabel back with us."

"Very well; you and Jessica meet me at my office at four o'clock to-morrow afternoon," said Mr. Bright. "But what do you girls in-

tend to do with her, once you get her? You can't adopt her, you know."

"She is to take turns living with us, papa," said Jessica, slipping her hand into her father's. "May she come here first? I'd love to have her."

Mr. Bright drew Jessica to his side. "My dear child, you know that you may do as you please about it. I feel sure that she must be the right sort of girl, or you and your friends wouldn't have become interested in her. Try her, and if you like her, then she is welcome to stay as long as she chooses. I think it would do you good to have a girl of your own age in the house."

"Three cheers for Mr. Bright," cried Nora.

The cheers were given with a will, then the girls joined hands and danced around Jessica's father, sounding their class yell until he broke through the circle and made a rush for the library, his fingers to his ears.

"Now that we have that question settled," said Miriam Nesbit, after the girls were once more seated, "I think we ought to have a sorority pin."

"I think," began Eva Allen, "that my brother would design a pin for us. He is very clever at that sort of thing."

"Let's have a monogram," exclaimed Grace.

"Old English letters of gold on a dull-green enamel background. We can get them up for about two dollars and a half apiece. Is that too expensive?"

The girls, who, with the exception of Anne, had small allowances of their own, expressed themselves satisfied; while Anne determined that for once she was justified in yielding to wild extravagance.

"That's settled," said Miriam. "The next thing to do is——"

But a loud ring of the door bell interrupted her speech and caused the whole party to start.

"Some one to see papa," said Jessica. "Go on with what you were saying, Miriam."

But before Miriam had a chance to continue, the maid entered the room, a letter in her hand.

"Here's a letter, Miss Jessica," she said. "But it's such a quare name on the outside, I be wondering if it's fur yerself and no other?"

Jessica looked at the envelope. It was addressed to the "Phi Sigma Tau, care of Miss Jessica Bright."

"Why, who in the world can this be from? I thought no one outside knew the name of our society as yet," said Jessica as she opened the end of the envelope. Then she turned the page, glanced at the signature, and gave a little cry of surprise.

"Just listen to this, girls!" she exclaimed, and read:

"'To the Phi Sigma Tau:

"'After initiating me into your ridiculous society, you have seen fit to call a meeting of the members without directly notifying me, therefore I wish to withdraw from your sorority, as I feel that I have been deeply insulted. I have this satisfaction, however, that I would not have met with you to-night, at any rate. I am entertaining some girls in your class this evening, whom I find far more congenial than any previous acquaintances I have made in Oakdale. We are about to organize a sorority of our own. Our object will be to enjoy ourselves, not to continually preach to other people. I am deeply disappointed in all of you, and assure you that I am not in the least desirous of continuing your acquaintance.

"'Yours sincerely,

"'Eleanor Savell.'"

"Well, of all things!" exclaimed Nora O'Malley. "She says she is deeply insulted because we didn't invite her, but that she didn't intend to come, at any rate. There's a shining example of consistency for you!"

"Who on earth told her about the meeting?" said Jessica. "We didn't wait to ask her to-day."

"I shall have to confess that I am the guilty one," said Eva Allen. "You didn't say anything to Miriam, Marian and me about Eleanor, and when I left the locker-room I went back upstairs after a book I had forgotten. I met Eleanor on the stairs and told her about the meeting, and that you were waiting in the locker-room for her. You must have left before she got there, and, of course, she thought you did it purposely."

"Oh, dear, what a mess," sighed Grace. "I didn't mean to slight her. But Nora said she knew, positively, that Eleanor was entertaining some guests to-night, so I didn't wait. By the way, Nora, what was that news of yours that you were so mysterious about this afternoon?"

"Just this," replied Nora. "That Edna Wright told me, that I needn't think we were the only people that could have a sorority. I asked her what she meant, and she said that she and Rose Lynton and Daisy Culver had been invited out to Eleanor's to-night for the purpose of forming a very select club of their own. I am sorry I didn't tell you while in the locker-room, but you would insist on having secrets, so I thought I'd have one, too."

"Well, it can't be helped now," said Grace. "It is a pity that Eleanor has taken up with Edna Wright. She is the only girl in the class

that I really dislike. She is frivolous and empty-headed, and Eleanor is self-willed and lawless. Put them together, and they will make a bad combination. As to the other two girls, they are sworn friends of Edna's."

"I think," said Nora, "that our reform movement is about to end in a glaring fizzle."

"How can we reform a person who won't have anything to do with us?" asked Jessica scornfully.

"Let us hold her place in this sorority open for her, and let us make it our business to be ready to help her if she needs us," said Anne thoughtfully. "Like all spoiled children, she is sure to get into mischief, and just as sure to come to grief. Mark my words, some day she'll be glad to come back to the Phi Sigma Tau."

CHAPTER IX

THE RESCUE PARTY

IT was with mingled feelings of excitement and trepidation that Grace Harlowe and Jessica Bright hurried toward the office of the latter's father the following afternoon. Now that they were fairly started on their mission of rescue, they were not quite so confident as to the result. To be sure they had unlimited faith in Jessica's father, but it was so much easier to talk about taking Mabel away from Miss Brant than to do it.

"I'm terribly afraid of facing her," confided Jessica to Grace. "She is the terror of Oakdale, you know."

"She can't hurt us," said Grace. "Your father will do all the talking. All we need to do is to take charge of Mabel, after Miss Brant gives her up."

"Well, young ladies," said Mr. Bright, as the two girls entered his office, "I see you are prompt in keeping your appointment. Let us go at once, for I must be back here at five o'clock."

"What are you going to say to that terrible woman, papa?" shuddered Jessica as they

neared the Brant home. "I'm afraid she'll scratch your eyes out."

"Am I really in such serious danger?" asked Mr. Bright in mock alarm. "I am glad I brought you girls along to protect me."

"You haven't any idea what a crank she is, Mr. Bright," laughed Grace. "She fairly snarled at us the other day, when we were coming from school, because she said we were taking up the whole sidewalk. Poor little Mabel, no wonder she has a scared look in her eyes all the time."

"Well, here we are," responded Mr. Bright, as he rang the bell. "Now for the tug of war."

As he spoke the door was opened by Mabel, who positively shook in her shoes when she saw her visitors. "Don't be frightened," whispered Grace, taking her hand. "We have come for you."

"May I speak with Miss Brant?" asked Mr. Bright courteously, as they stepped into the narrow hall.

Before Mabel had time to answer, a tall, raw-boned woman, with a hard, forbidding face, shoved her aside and confronted them. It was Miss Brant herself.

"Well, what do you want?" she said rudely.

"Good afternoon," said Mr. Bright courteously. "Am I speaking to Miss Brant?"

"I guess likely you are," responded the woman, "and you better state your business now, for I've no time to fool away on strangers."

"You have a young girl with you by the name of Mabel Allison, have you not?" asked Mr. Bright.

"Yes, I have. What's the matter with her? Has she been gettin' into mischief? If she has, I'll tan her hide," said Miss Brant, with a threatening gesture.

"On the contrary," replied Mr. Bright, "I hear very good reports of her. Has she lived with you long?"

"That's none of your business," snapped Miss Brant. "If you've come here to quiz me and pry around about her, you can get right out, for I'm not answering any fool questions."

"I will not trouble you with further questions," replied Mr. Bright, "but will proceed at once to business. I have come to take Miss Mabel away with me. She has found friends who are willing to help her until she finishes her education, and she wishes to go to them."

"Oh, she does, does she?" sneered the woman mockingly. "Well, you just take her, if you dare."

"Have you legally adopted her?" asked Mr. Bright quietly.

"That's none of your business, either. You get out of my house or I'll throw you out and these two snips of girls with you," almost screamed Miss Brant.

"That will do," said Mr. Bright sternly. "We will go, but we shall take Miss Mabel with us. I am a lawyer, Miss Brant, and I have positive proof that this child is not bound to you in any way. You took her from the orphanage on trial, exactly as you might hire a servant. You did not even take the trouble to have yourself appointed her guardian. You agreed to pay her for her work, but blows and harsh words are the only payment she has ever received at your hands. She wishes to leave you because she can no longer endure life with you. You haven't the slightest claim upon her, and she is perfectly free to do as she chooses. She is not of age yet, but as you are not her guardian, you had no right to take money that she has earned from her, and she can call you to account for it if she chooses. However, you have imposed upon her for the last time, for she shall not spend another hour under your roof."

"You touch her if you dare. She shan't leave this house," said the woman in a furious tone.

"Mabel," said Mr. Bright to the young girl, who was cowering at one end of the hall, "get

your things and come at once. We will wait for you. As for you," turning to Miss Brant, "if you try to stop her, you will soon find yourself in a most unpleasant position. I am certain that if you think back for an instant you will realize that you have forfeited all right to object."

For a moment Miss Brant stood speechless with anger, then in her wrath she poured forth such a flood of abuse that the rescue party stared in amazement. Never had they seen such an exhibition of temper. When Mabel appeared, her shabby hat in her hand, Miss Brant reached forward and tore the hat from her.

"Don't you dare leave my house with any of my property, you baggage," she hissed. "I paid for that hat and for the clothes you're wearing, and you'll send every stitch you've on back to me, or I'll have you arrested for stealing."

"Come on, Mabel," said Grace, putting her arm around the shrinking little figure. "Don't pay any attention to her. She isn't worth bothering over. You can send her back her ridiculous things. You are going to be happy now, and forget all about this cruel, terrible woman."

"You brazen imp, you," screamed the woman, and rushed at Grace, who stood perfectly still,

"Don't You Dare Leave This House With My Property."

looking the angry woman in the face with such open scorn in her gray eyes that Miss Brant drew back and stood scowling at her, her hands working convulsively.

"Come, girls," said Mr. Bright. "We have no more time to waste. If you have anything to say to me, Miss Brant, you can always find me at my office on East Main Street. The clothing now worn by Miss Mabel will be returned to you in due season. Good afternoon."

Mr. Bright, bowing politely, motioned to the three young girls to precede him, and the party went quietly down the walk, leaving Miss Brant in the open door, shaking her fist and uttering dire threats.

As for Mabel, she collapsed utterly, crying as though her heart would break. Grace and Jessica exerted every effort to quiet her sobs, and after a little she looked up, and, smiling through her tears, said brokenly: "I can't believe that it's all true—that I shall never have to go back there again. I'm afraid that it's all a dream and that I'll wake up and find her standing over me. Can she get me again?" she said, turning piteously to Mr. Bright.

"My dear little girl," he said, taking her hand, "she can't touch you. I'll adopt you myself before I'll let you go back to her. Now run along with Jessica and forget all about

what has passed. Good-bye, Grace. You see, your rescue party proved a success. Good-bye, daughter. Take good care of Mabel. I'll have to hurry now, or miss my appointment."

Mr. Bright beamed on the three girls, raised his hat and hurried down the street, leaving them to proceed slowly toward Jessica's home. Passersby glanced curiously at the hatless, shabby young girl, as she walked between Grace and Jessica, clinging to their hands as though expecting every minute to be snatched from them.

"Well, girls," said Grace, "here is my street. I must leave you now. Be good children, and——"

She was interrupted by an exultant shriek, and a second later five girls appeared as by magic and gleefully surrounded the rescue party. The Phi Sigma Tau was out in full force.

"Hurrah!" shrieked Nora, waving her school bag. "'We have met the enemy and they are ours.' Tell us about it quickly. Why didn't you let me go along? I was dying to cross swords with that old stone face."

Then everyone talked at once, surrounding Mabel and asking her questions until Grace said, laughing: "Stop it, girls; let her get used to you gradually. Don't come down on her like an avalanche."

Mabel, however, was equal to the occasion. She answered their questions without embarrassment, and seemed quietly pleased at their demonstrations.

"You are the child of the sorority now, Mabel," said Miriam Nesbit, "and we are your adopted mothers. You will have your hands full trying to please all of us."

"Stop teasing her," said Anne, "or she'll run away before she is fairly adopted."

"It is very uncertain as to whether she will ever go further than my house," said Jessica calmly. "I need Mabel more than do the rest of you, but perhaps if you're good I'll loan her to you occasionally. Come on, Mabel, let's go home before they spoil you completely."

"Considering the fact that the Bright family did two thirds of the rescuing, I suppose we shall have to respect your claim," said Nora, "but remember, Jessica, that generosity is a beautiful virtue to cultivate."

CHAPTER X

JULIA PERFORMS A SACRED DUTY

"WHAT have we ever done that we should be so neglected?" said David Nesbit, swinging himself from his motorcycle and landing squarely in front of Grace Harlowe and Anne Pierson while they were out walking one afternoon.

"Why, David Nesbit, how can you make such statements?" replied Grace, looking at the young man in mock disapproval. "You know perfectly well that you've been shut up in your old laboratory all fall. We have scarcely seen you since the walking party. You have even given football the go by, and I'm so sorry, for you were a star player last year."

"I see you have discovered the secrets of my past life," replied David, laughing. "That's what comes of having a sister who belongs to a sorority. However, you folks are equally guilty, you've all gone mad over your sorority, and left Hippy and Reddy and me to wander about Oakdale like lost souls. I hear you've adopted a girl, too. Reddy is horribly jealous of her. He says Jessica won't look at him any more."

"Reddy is laboring under a false impression," said Anne. "He is head over heels in football practice and has forgotten he ever knew Jessica. As for Hippy, Nora says that he is studying night and day, and that he is actually wearing himself away by burning midnight oil."

"Yes, Hippy is studying some this year," replied David. "You see this is our senior year, and we are going to enter the same college next year, if all goes well. You know Hippy never bothered himself much about study, just managed to scrape through. But now he'll have to hustle if he gets through with High School this year, and he's wide awake to that fact."

"Under those circumstances, Hippy is forgiven, but not you and Reddy!" said Grace severely. "You'll have to have better excuses than football and experiments."

"I'll tell you what we'll do to square ourselves," said David, smiling. "We'll take you girls to the football game next Thursday. It's Thanksgiving Day, you know, and Oakdale is going to play Georgetown College. Reddy's on the team, but Hippy and I will do the honors."

"Fine," replied Grace. "But are you willing to burden yourselves with some extra girls? You see it's this way. One of the things that

our sorority has pledged itself to do this year is to look up the stray girls in High School, and see that they are not lonely and homesick during holiday seasons. I used to know nearly all the girls in school, but ever so many new ones have crept in, and some of them have come here from quite a distance, on account of the excellence of our High School. After we adopted Mabel Allison, we began looking about us for other fish to fry, and found out about these girls. So every girl in the sorority has invited one or more of these lonely ones for Thanksgiving Day. They are to come in the morning and stay until the lights go out, which will be late, for mother has consented to let me have a party and all those new girls are to be the guests of honor.

"Mrs. Gray is in it, too. She insists on having Anne with her on Thanksgiving, although Anne had invited two girls to her house," continued Grace. "Mrs. Gray had planned a party for us, but when we told her what we were about to do, she gave up her party and agreed to go to mine instead, on condition that Anne's family, plus Anne's two guests, should have dinner with her."

"Bless her dear heart," said David, "she is always thinking of the pleasure of others. Now about the football game. Bring your girls

along and I'll do my best to give them a good time, although I'm generally anything but a success with new girls. However, Hippy makes up for what I lack. He can entertain a regiment of them, and not even exert himself. Now I must leave you, for I have a very important engagement at home."

"In the laboratory, I suppose," said Anne teasingly.

"Just so," replied David. "Good-bye, girls. Let me know how many tickets you want for the game." He raised his cap, mounted his machine and was off down the street.

"It will seem good to have a frolic with the boys again, won't it?" said Grace to Anne as they strolled along.

"We do seem to be getting awfully serious and settled of late," replied Anne. "Why, this sorority business has taken up all our spare time lately. We've had so many special meetings."

"I know it," replied Grace, "but after Thanksgiving we'll only meet once in two weeks, for I must get my basketball team in shape, and you see all the members belong to the society."

"You ought to do extra good work this year," observed Anne, "for the team is absolutely harmonious. Last season seems like a dream to me now."

"It was real enough then," replied Grace grimly. "I have forgiven, long ago, but I have not forgotten the way some of those girls performed last year. It was remarkable that things ever straightened themselves. The clouds looked black for a while, didn't they?"

Anne pressed Grace's hand by way of answer. The sophomore year had been crowded with many trials, some of them positive school tragedies, in which Anne and Grace had been the principal actors.

"What are you two mooning over?" asked a gay voice, and the two girls turned with a start to find Julia Crosby grinning cheerfully at them.

"O Julia, how glad I am to see you at close range!" exclaimed Grace. "Admiring you from a distance isn't a bit satisfactory."

"Business, children, business," said Julia briskly. "That's the only thing that keeps me from your side. The duties of the class president are many and irksome. At the present moment I've a duty on hand that I don't in the least relish, and I want your august assistance. Will you promise to help before I tell you?"

"Why, of course," answered Grace and Anne in the same breath. "What is it you want us to do?"

"Well, it seems that some of your juniors are

still in need of discipline. You remember the hatchet that we buried last year with such pomp and ceremony?"

"Yes, yes," was the answer.

"This morning I overheard certain girls planning to go out to the Omnibus House after school to-morrow and dig up the poor hatchet and flaunt it in the seniors' faces the day of the opening basketball game, simply to rattle us. Just as though it wouldn't upset your team as much as ours. It's an idiotic trick, at any rate, and anything but funny. Now I propose to take four of our class, and you must select four of yours. We'll hustle out there the minute school is over to-morrow, and be ready to receive the marauders when they arrive. Select your girls, but don't tell them what you want or they may tell some one about it beforehand."

"Well, of all impudence!" exclaimed Anne. "Who are the girls, Julia? Are you sure they're juniors?"

"The two I heard talking are juniors. I don't know who else is in it. They'll be very much astonished to find us 'waiting at the church'—Omnibus House, I mean," said Julia, "and I imagine they'll feel rather silly, too."

"Tell us who they are, Julia," said Grace. "We don't want to to go into this blindfolded."

"Wait and see," replied Julia tantalizingly.

"Then you'll feel more indignant and can help my cause along all the better. I give you my word that the girls I overheard talking are not particular friends of yours. You aren't going to back out, are you, and leave me without proper support?"

"Of course not," laughed Grace. "Don't worry. We'll support you, only you must agree to do all the talking."

"I shall endeavor to overcome their insane freshness with a few well-chosen words," Julia promised. "Be sure and be on hand early."

Grace chose Anne, Nora, Jessica and Marian Barber, the latter three being considerably mystified at her request, but nevertheless agreeing to be on hand when school closed. They were met at the gate by Julia and four other seniors, and the whole party set out for the Omnibus House without delay.

Grace walked with Julia, and the two girls found plenty to say to each other during the walk. Julia was studying hard, she told Grace. She wanted to enter Smith next year.

"I don't know where I shall go after I finish High School," said Grace. "Ethel Post wants me to go to Wellesley. She'll be a junior when I'm a freshman. You know, she was graduated from High School last June and she could help me a lot in getting used to college. But I don't

know whether I should like Wellesley. I shall not try to decide where I want to go for a while yet."

"Wherever we are we'll write and always be friends," said Julia, and Grace warmly acquiesced.

As they neared the old Omnibus House they could see no one about.

"We're early!" exclaimed Julia. "The enemy has not arrived. Thank goodness, it's not cold to-day or we might have a chilly vigil. Now listen, all ye faithful, while I set forth the object of this walk." She thereupon related what Grace and Anne already knew.

"What a shame!" cried Marian Barber. "It isn't the hatchet we care for, it's the principle of the thing. Give them what they deserve, Julia."

"Never fear," replied Julia. "I'll effectually attend to their case. Now we'd better dodge around the corner and keep out of sight until they get here. Then we'll swoop down upon them unawares."

The avengers hurriedly concealed themselves at the side of the old house where they could not be seen by an approaching party.

They had not waited long before they heard voices.

"They're coming," whispered Julia. "There

are eight of them. Form in line and when they get nicely started, we'll circle about them and hem them in. I'll give you the signal."

The girls waited in silence. "They have trowels," Julia informed them from time to time. "They have a spade. They've begun to dig, and they are having their own troubles, for the ground is hard. All ready! March!"

Softly the procession approached the spot where the marauders were energetically digging. Grace gave a little gasp, and reaching back caught Anne's hand.

The girl using the spade was Eleanor.

"Now I'm in for it," groaned Grace. "She's down on me now, and she'll be sure to think I organized the whole thing." For an instant Grace regretted making the promise to Julia, before learning the situation; then, holding her head a trifle more erect, she decided to make the best of her unfortunate predicament.

"It isn't Julia's fault," she thought. "She probably knows nothing about our acquaintance with Eleanor; besides, Eleanor has no business to play such tricks. Edna Wright must have told her all about last year."

Her reflections were cut short, for one of the girls glanced up from her digging with a sudden exclamation which drew all eyes toward Julia and her party.

"Well, little folks," said Julia in mock surprise, "what sort of a party is this? Are you making mud pies or are you pretending you are at the seashore?"

At Julia's first words Eleanor dropped the small spade she held and straightened up, the picture of defiance. Her glance traveled from girl to girl, and she curled her lip contemptuously as her eye rested on Grace and Anne. The other diggers looked sheepishly at Julia, who stood eyeing them in a way that made them feel "too foolish for anything," as one of them afterwards expressed it.

"Why don't you answer me, little girls?" asked Julia. "Has the kitty stolen your tongue?"

This was too much for Eleanor.

"How dare you speak to us in that manner and treat us as though we were children?" she burst forth. "What business is it of yours why we are here? Do you own this property?"

"Mercy, no," replied Julia composedly. "Do you?"

"No," replied Eleanor a trifle less rudely, "but we have as much right here as you have."

"Granted," replied Julia calmly. "However, there is this difference. You are here to make mischief and we are here to prevent it, and, furthermore, are going to do so."

"What do you mean?" retorted Eleanor, her eyes flashing.

"Just this," replied Julia. "Last year the girls belonging to the present senior and junior classes met on this very spot and amicably disposed of a two-year-old class grudge. Emblematic of this they buried a hatchet, once occupying a humble though honorable position in the Crosby family, but cheerfully sacrificed for the good of the cause."

"Yesterday," continued Julia, "I overheard two juniors plotting to get possession of this same hatchet for the purpose of flaunting it in the faces of the seniors at the opening basketball game. Therefore I decided to take a hand in things, and here I am, backed by girls from both classes, who are of the self-same mind."

"Really, Miss Crosby," said Edna Wright, "you are very amusing."

"My friends all think so," returned Julia sweetly, "but never mind now about my amusing qualities, Edna. Let's talk about the present situation."

She looked at Edna with the old-time aggravating smile that was always warranted to further incense her opponent. It had its desired effect, for Edna fairly bristled with indignation and was about to make a furious reply when she was pushed aside by Eleanor, who

said loftily, "Allow me to talk to this person, Edna."

"No," said Julia resolutely, every vestige of a smile leaving her face at Eleanor's words. "It would be useless for you to attempt to be spokesman in this matter, because you are a new girl in High School and know nothing of past class matters except from hearsay. But you have with you seven girls who do know all about the enmity that was buried here last spring, and who ought to have enough good sense to know that this afternoon's performance is liable to bring it to life again.

"If you girls carry this hatchet to school and exhibit it to the seniors on the day of the game you are apt to start bad feeling all over again," she said, turning to the others. "There are sure to be some girls in the senior class who would resent it. Neither class has played tricks on the other since peace was declared, and we don't want to begin now.

"That's the reason I asked Grace to appoint a committee of juniors and come out here with me. I feel sure that under the circumstances the absent members of both classes would agree with us if they were present. Digging up a rusty old hatchet is nothing, but digging up a rusty old grudge is quite another matter. We didn't come here to quarrel, but I appeal to

you, as members of the junior class, to think before you do something that is bound to cause us all annoyance and perhaps unhappiness."

There was complete silence after Julia finished speaking. What she had said evidently impressed them. Eleanor alone looked belligerent.

"Perhaps we'd better let the old hatchet alone," Daisy Culver said sullenly. "The fun is all spoiled now, and everyone will know about it before school begins to-morrow."

"Daisy, how can you say so?" exclaimed Grace, who, fearing a scene with Eleanor, had hitherto remained silent. "You know perfectly well that none of us will say anything about it. Why, we came out here simply to try to prevent your doing something that might stir up trouble again between the senior and junior classes. There isn't a girl here who would be so contemptible as to tell any one outside about what has happened to-day."

This was Eleanor's opportunity. Turning furiously on Grace, her eyes flashing, she exclaimed: "Yes, there is one girl who would tell anything, and that girl is you! You pretend to be honorable and high-principled, but you are nothing but a hypocrite and a sneak. I would not trust you as far as I could see you. I have no doubt Miss Crosby obtained her in-

formation about this affair to-day from you, and that everyone in school will hear it from the same source. You seem determined to meddle with matters that do not concern you, and I warn you that if you do not change your tactics you may regret it.

"You seem to think yourself the idol of your class, but there are some of the girls who are too clever to be deceived. They do not belong among the number who trail tamely after you, either. And now I wish to say that I despise you and all your friends, and wish never to speak to any of you again. Come on, girls," she said, turning to the members of her party, who had listened in silent amazement to her attack upon Grace. "Let us go. Let them keep their trumpery hatchet."

With these words she turned and stalked across the field to the road, where her runabout stood. After an instant's hesitation, she was followed by Edna, Daisy Culver and those who had come with her. Henceforth there would again be two distinct factions in the junior class.

"Good gracious," exclaimed Julia Crosby. "Talk about your human whirlwinds! What on earth did you ever do to her, Grace?"

But Grace could not answer. She was winking hard to keep back the tears. Twice she

attempted to speak and failed. "Never mind her, dear," said Julia, slipping her arm about Grace, while the other girls gathered round with many expressions of displeasure at Eleanor's cruel speech.

"I can't help feeling badly," said Grace, with a sob. "She said such dreadful things."

"No one who knows you would believe them," replied Julia. "By the way, who is she? I know her name is Savell and that she's a recent arrival in Oakdale, but considering the plain and uncomplimentary manner in which she addressed you, you must have seriously offended her ladyship."

"I'll tell you about her as we walk along," replied Grace, wiping her eyes and smiling a little.

"Yes, we had better be moving," said Julia. "The battle is over. No one has been killed and only one wounded. Nevertheless, the enemy has retired in confusion."

CHAPTER XI

WORRIES AND PLANS

ALTHOUGH the girls belonging to Julia's party were silent concerning what happened at the Omnibus House, the story leaked out, creating considerable discussion among the members of the two upper classes. Julia Crosby had a shrewd suspicion that Edna Wright had been the original purveyor of the news, and in this she was right. Edna had, under pledge of secrecy, told it to a sophomore, who immediately told it to her dearest friend, and so the tale traveled until it reached Eleanor, with numerous additions, far from pleasing to her. She was thoroughly angry, and at once laid the matter at Grace's door, while her animosity toward Grace grew daily.

But Grace was not the only person that Eleanor disliked. From the day that Miss Thompson had taken her to task for absence, she had entertained a supreme contempt for the principal of which Miss Thompson was wholly unaware until, encountering Eleanor one morning in the corridor, the latter had stared at her with an expression of such open scorn and dislike that Miss Thompson felt her color rise. A di-

rect slap in the face could scarcely have conveyed greater insult than did that one insolent glance. The principal was at a loss as to its import. She wisely decided to ignore it, but stored it up in her memory for future reference.

The sorority that Eleanor had mentioned in her letter to the Phi Sigma Tau, was now in full flower. The seven girls who had accompanied her to the Omnibus House were the chosen members. They wore pins in the shape of skulls and cross bones, and went about making mysterious signs to each other whenever they met. The very name of the society was shrouded in mystery, though Nora O'Malley was heard to declare that she had no doubt it was a branch of the "Black Hand."

Eleanor was the acknowledged leader, but Edna Wright became a close second, and between them they managed to disseminate a spirit of mischief throughout the school that the teachers found hard to combat.

Grace Harlowe watched the trend that affairs were taking with considerable anxiety. Like herself, there were plenty of girls in school to whom mischief did not appeal, but Eleanor's beauty, wealth and fascinating personality were found to dazzle some of the girls, who would follow her about like sheep, and it was over these girls that Grace felt worried. If Eleanor

were to organize and carry out any malicious piece of mischief and they were implicated, they would all have to suffer for what she would be directly responsible. Grace's heart was with her class. She wished it to be a class among classes, and felt an almost motherly anxiety for its success.

"What does ail some of our class?" she exclaimed to Anne and Nora one day as they left the school building. "They seem possessed with imps. The Phi Sigma Tau girls and a few of the grinds are really the only ones who behave lately."

"It's largely due to Eleanor, I think," replied Anne. "She seems to have become quite a power among some of the girls in the class. She is helping to destroy that spirit of earnestness that you have tried so hard to cultivate. I think it's a shame, too. The upper class girls ought to set the example for the two lower classes."

"That's just what worries me," said Grace earnestly. "Hardly a recitation passes in my class without some kind of disturbance, and it is always traced to one of the girls in that crowd. The juniors will get the reputation among the teachers this year that the junior class had last, and it seems such a pity. I overheard Miss Chester tell Miss Kane the other

day that her junior classes were the most trying of the day, because she had to work harder to maintain discipline than to teach her subject."

"That's a nice reputation to carry around, isn't it?" remarked Nora indignantly. "But all we can do is to try harder than ever to make things go smoothly. I don't believe their society will last long, at any rate. Those girls are sure to quarrel among themselves, and that will end the whole thing. Or they may go too far and have Miss Thompson to reckon with, and that would probably cool their ardor."

"O girls!" exclaimed Grace. "Speaking of Miss Thompson, reminds me that I have something to tell you. What do you suppose the latest is?"

"If you know anything new, it is your duty to tell us at once, without making us beg for it," said Nora reprovingly.

"All right; I accept the reproof," said Grace. "Now for my news. There is talk of giving a Shakespearian play, with Miss Tebbs to engineer it, and the cast to be chosen from the three lower classes. The seniors, of course, will give their own play later."

"How did you find out?" asked Anne.

"Miss Thompson herself told me about it," replied Grace. "She called on mother yester-

day afternoon, and, for a wonder, I was at home. She said that it was not positively decided yet, but if the girls did well with the mid-year tests, then directly after there would be a try out for parts, and rehearsals would begin without delay."

"How splendid!" exclaimed Anne, clasping her hands. "How I would love to take part in it!"

"You will, without doubt, if there is a try out," replied Grace. "There is no one in school who can recite as you do; besides, you have been on the stage."

"I shall try awfully hard for a part, even if it is only two lines," said Anne earnestly. "I wonder what play is to be chosen, and if it is to be given for the school only?"

"The play hasn't been decided upon yet," replied Grace, "but the object of it is to get some money for new books for the school library. The plan is to charge fifty cents a piece for the tickets and to give each girl a certain number of them to sell. However, I'm not going to bother much about the play now, for the senior team has just sent me a challenge to play them Saturday, December 12th. So I'll have to get the team together and go to work."

"We're awfully late this year about starting. Don't you think so?" asked Nora.

"Yes," admitted Grace. "I am just as enthusiastic over basketball as ever, only I haven't had the time to devote to it that I did last year."

"Never mind, you'll make up for lost time after Thanksgiving," said Anne soothingly. "As for me, I'm going to dream about the play."

"Anne, I believe you have more love for the stage than you will admit," said Grace, laughing. "You are all taken up with the idea of this play."

"If one could live in the same atmosphere as that of home, then there could be no profession more delightful than that of the actor," replied Anne thoughtfully. "It is wonderful to feel that one is able to forget one's self and become some one else. But it is more wonderful to make one's audience feel it, too. To have them forget that one is anything except the living, breathing person whose character one is trying to portray. I suppose it's the sense of power that one has over people's emotions that makes acting so fascinating. It is the other side that I hate," she added, with a slight shudder.

"I suppose theatrical people do undergo many hardships," said Grace, who, now that the subject had been opened, wanted to hear more of Anne's views of the stage.

"Unless any girl has remarkable talent, I should advise her to keep off the stage," said Anne decidedly. "Of course when a girl comes of a theatrical family for generations, like Maud Adams or Ethel Barrymore, then that is different. She is practically born, bred and brought up in the theatre. She is as carefully guarded as though she lived in a little village, simply because she knows from babyhood all the unpleasant features of the profession and how to avoid them. There is some chance of her becoming great, too. Of course real stars do appear once in a while, who are too talented to be kept down. However, the really great ones are few and far between. When I compare my life before I came here with the good times I have had since I met you girls, I hate the very idea of the stage.

"Only," she concluded with a shame-faced air, "there are times when the desire to act is irresistible, and it did make my heart beat a little bit faster when I heard about the play."

"You dear little mouse," said Grace, putting her arm around Anne. "I was only jesting when I spoke about your love for the stage. I think I understand how you feel, and I hope you get the best part in the play. I know you'll make good."

"She certainly will," said Nora. "But, to

give the play a rest and come down to every-day affairs, where shall we meet to go to the football game?"

"Let me see," said Grace. "The game is to be called at three o'clock. I suppose we shall all be through dinner by half past two. You had better bring your girls to my house. Each of you is to have two and Jessica has one besides Mabel. I am to have three; I found another yesterday. David promised to get me the tickets. I wonder how he and Hippy will enjoy chaperoning thirteen girls?"

"I won't have the slightest chance to talk to Hippy," grumbled Nora, "and he has neglected us shamefully of late, too."

"Never mind, you can have him all to yourself at my party," consoled Grace. "By the way, girls, do you think it would be of any use to invite Eleanor?"

"Eleanor?" exclaimed Nora. "After what she has said to you! You might as well throw your invitation into the fire, for it's safe to say that she will do so when she receives it."

Nevertheless, Grace wrote a cordial little note to Eleanor that evening, and two days later she received Eleanor's reply through the mail. On opening the envelope the pieces of her own note fell out, with a half sheet of paper containing the words, "Declined with thanks."

CHAPTER XII

A RECKLESS CHAUFFEUR

THANKSGIVING DAY dawned bright and clear, with just enough frost in the air to make one's blood tingle. It had been a mild fall, with a late Indian summer, and only one or two snow flurries that had lasted but a few hours. This was unusual for Oakdale, as winter generally came with a rush before the middle of November, and treated the inhabitants of that northern city to a taste of zero weather long before the Christmas holidays.

It was with a light heart that Grace Harlowe ate her breakfast and flitted about the house, putting a final touch here and there before receiving her guests. Before eleven o'clock everything was finished, and as she arranged the last flower in its vase she felt a little thrill of pride as she looked about the pretty drawing room. Before going upstairs to dress, she ran into the reception hall for the fourth time to feast her eyes upon a huge bunch of tall chrysanthemums in the beautiful Japanese vase that stood in the alcove under the stairs. They had come about an hour before with a note from Tom Gray saying that he had arrived in Oak-

dale that morning, had seen the boys and would be around to help David and Reddy at the "girl convention," as he termed it.

Grace was overjoyed at the idea of seeing Tom Gray again. They had been firm friends since her freshman year, and had entertained a wholesome, boy-and-girl preference for each other untinged by any trace of foolish sentimentality.

As she dressed for dinner, Grace felt perfectly happy except for one thing. She still smarted a little at Eleanor's rude reply to her invitation. She was one of those tender-hearted girls who disliked being on bad terms with any one, and she really liked Eleanor still, in spite of the fact that Eleanor did not in the least return the sentiment.

Grace sighed a little over the rebuff, and then completely forgot her trouble as she donned the new gown that had just come from the dressmaker. It was of Italian cloth in a beautiful shade of dark red, made in one piece, with a yoke of red and gold net, and trimmed with tiny enameled buttons. It fitted her straight, slender figure perfectly and she decided that for once she had been wise in foregoing her favorite blue and choosing red.

The party that evening was to be a strictly informal affair. Grace had suspected that the

girls whom the members of the Phi Sigma Tau were to entertain were not likely to possess evening gowns. In order to avoid any possibility of hurt feelings, she had quietly requested those invited to wear the afternoon gowns in which they would appear at the game.

Before one o'clock her guests had arrived. They were three shy, quiet girls who had worshiped Grace from a distance, and who had been surprised almost to tears by her invitation. Two of them were from Portville, a small town about seventy miles from Oakdale, and had begun High School with Grace, who had been too busy with her own affairs up to the present to find out much about them.

The other girl, Marie Bateman, had entered the class that year. She had come from a little village forty miles south of Oakdale, was the oldest of a large family, her mother being a widow of very small means. As her mother was unable to send her away to school, she had done clerical work for the only lawyer in the home town for the previous two years, studying between whiles. She had entered the High School in the junior class, determining to graduate and then to work her way through Normal School. By dint of questioning, Grace had discovered that she lived in a shabby little room in the suburbs, never went anywhere and did

anything honest in the way of earning money that she could find to do.

The realization of what some of these girls were willing to endure for the sake of getting an education made Grace feel guilty at being so comfortably situated. She determined that the holidays that year should not find them without friends and cheer.

After a rousing Thanksgiving dinner, in which the inevitable turkey, with all its toothsome accompaniments, played a prominent part, the girls retired to Grace's room for a final adjustment of hair and a last survey in the mirror before going to the game. High School matters formed the principal theme of conversation, and Grace was not surprised to learn that Eleanor had been carrying things with a high hand in third-year French class, in which Ellen Holt, one of the Portville girls, recited.

"She speaks French as well as Professor La Roche," said Miss Holt, "but she nearly drives him crazy sometimes. She will pretend she doesn't understand him and will make him explain the construction of a sentence over and over again, or she will argue with him about a point until he loses his temper completely. She makes perfectly ridiculous caricatures of him, and leaves them on his desk when class is over, and she asks him to translate im-

pertinent slang phrases, which he does, sometimes, before he realizes how they are going to sound. Then the whole class laughs at him. She certainly makes things lively in that class."

The sound of the bell cut short the chat and the four girls hurried downstairs to greet Jessica, Mabel and the girls who were the Bright's guests. Nora and Anne, with their charges, came next, and last of all David, Tom and Hippy paraded up the walk, in single file, blowing lustily on tin horns and waving blue and white banners. A brief season of introduction followed, then Grace distributed blue and white rosettes with long streamers that she had made for the occasion, to each member of the party. Well supplied with Oakdale colors, they set out for the football grounds, where an immense crowd of people had gathered to see the big game of the season.

"I shall never forget the first football game I saw in Oakdale," said Anne to David as they made their way to the grandstand. "It ended very sensationally for me."

"I should say it did," replied David, smiling. "Confidentially, Anne, do you ever hear from your father?"

"Not very often," replied Anne. "He is not liable to trouble me again, however, because he knows that I will not go back to the stage,

no matter what he says. He was with the western company of 'True Hearts' last year, but I don't know where he is now, and I don't care. Don't think I'm unfeeling; but it is impossible for me to care for him, even though he is my father."

"I understand," said David sympathetically. "Now let's forget him and have a good time."

"Hurrah! Here comes the band!" shouted Hippy.

The "Oakdale Military Band" took their places in the improvised bandstand and began a short concert before the game with the "Stars and Stripes," while the spectators unconsciously kept time with their feet to the inspiring strains.

When the two teams appeared on the field there were shouts of enthusiasm from the friends of the players, and the band burst forth with the High School song, in which the students joined.

After the usual preliminaries, the game began, and for the next hour everything else was forgotten save the battle that waged between the two teams.

Miriam Nesbit, Eva Allen and Marian Barber, with their guests, joined Grace's party, and soon the place they occupied became the very center of enthusiasm. Reddy, who was playing left end on the home team, received an ovation

every time he made a move, and when towards the end of the game he made a touchdown, his friends nearly split their loyal throats in expressing their approval.

It was over at last, and Oakdale had won a complete victory over the Georgetown foe, who took their defeat with becoming grace. As soon as Reddy could free himself from the grasp of his school fellows, who would have borne him from the field in triumph if he had not stoutly resisted, he hurried to his friends, who showered him with congratulations.

"O you Titian-haired star!" cried Hippy, clasping his hands in mock admiration. "You are the rarest jewel in the casket. Words fail to express my feelings.

" 'O joy, O bliss, O rapture! Let happiness now hap!
I am a sea of gurgling glee, with ecstacy on tap.' "

Hippy recited this effusion in a killing falsetto voice, and endeavored to embrace Reddy fervently, but was dragged back by Tom and David, to Reddy's visible relief.

"He's the idol of the hour. Don't put your irreverent hands on him," was David's injunction.

"But I adore idols," persisted Hippy. "Let me at him."

"Quit it, fat one!" growled Reddy, with a grin. "I'll settle with you later."

With gay laughter and jest, the young folks made their way from the grounds and started down the road toward home.

The whole party, walking four abreast, had just turned the curve where the road ended and Main Street began, when there was a hoarse honk! honk! and a runabout decorated in blue and white, containing Eleanor and Edna Wright, bore down upon them at lightning speed. The girls, uttering little cries of alarm, scattered to both sides of the road, with the exception of Mabel Allison, who, in her hurry to get out of the way, stumbled and fell directly in the path of the oncoming machine.

CHAPTER XIII

A THANKSGIVING FROLIC

BUT sudden as had been Mabel's fall, Grace Harlowe was equal to the emergency. With a bound she reached the middle of the road, seized Mabel and dragged her back just as the runabout passed over the place where she had fallen. It almost grazed her outstretched hand, then shot on down the road without slackening its speed for an instant.

There was a cry of horror from the young folks that ended in a sigh of relief. David and Tom Gray quickly raised Mabel to her feet and turned to Grace, whose face was ghastly, while she trembled like a leaf. The reaction had set in the moment she realized that Mabel was safe. Jessica and Nora had both begun to cry, while the faces of the others fully expressed their feelings.

"Grace," said Tom in a husky voice, "that was the quickest move I ever saw any one make."

Grace drew a long breath, the color returned to her pale face and in a measure she recovered herself.

"Some one had to do something," she said weakly. "I was the nearest to her, that's all. Are you hurt, Mabel, dear?" she asked, turning to the young girl, who stood by Jessica, looking white and dazed.

"It came so suddenly," she faltered, "I couldn't get up. It was awful!" She shuddered, then burst into tears, burying her face in Jessica's shoulder.

"There, there," soothed Jessica, wiping her own eyes. "It's all right now. Stand up straight and let me brush your coat. You are all mud."

"Here come the would-be murderesses now," cried Hippy. "They actually managed to stop and turn around, and now they are coming this way. One of them is my pet abomination—Miss Wright. She used to call me 'fatty' when I was little, and I've never forgiven her. But who is the reckless young person playing chauffeur? She ought to be put in jail for exceeding the speed limit."

"Hush!" said Grace. "Here she is."

The runabout had stopped and Eleanor alighted. Ignoring the four chums, she walked up to Miriam Nesbit.

"Will you please tell me if any one is hurt?" she asked pettishly. "I saw some one fall, but couldn't stop the machine. I supposed the high-

way was for vehicles, not pedestrians four abreast."

"Miss Savell, you have just missed running over Miss Allison," said Miriam coldly. "Had it not been for Miss Harlowe, there would have been a serious accident. I should advise you to drive more carefully in future, or you may not escape so easily another time."

Eleanor flushed at these words and said haughtily, "I did not ask for advice, I asked for information."

"Very true," replied Miriam calmly, "but you see I have given you both."

"You are the most ill-bred lot of girls I have ever seen," returned Eleanor crossly, "and I think you are making a great deal of unnecessary fuss over a small matter. Why didn't your prize orphan get out of the way with the rest of you? Besides, you have no right to block a public highway, as you did. I am very sorry I came back at all."

Turning on her heel, she walked back to the runabout, climbed in and drove down the road like the wind, apparently indifferent as to what comment her heartless behavior might create.

"Who on earth is that girl?" inquired Reddy Brooks. "She has about as much sympathy as a stone."

"That is Eleanor Savell," replied Anne Pier-

son, "and she can be nice if she wishes, but she doesn't like us very well. That's why she was so hateful."

"So that's the famous Eleanor?" said Tom Gray in a low tone to Grace. "Aunt Rose was telling me about her this morning at breakfast. I supposed she was a great friend of yours."

"She was, but she isn't," returned Grace. "That's rather indefinite. However, I'll tell you about it as we go back."

"She certainly can't complain as far as looks are concerned," said Hippy. "She must have yards of blue ribbon that she won at baby shows when but a mere infant."

"Attention, boys and girls," cried Grace. "Let us forget what has happened and have just as good a time to-night as we can. We mustn't spoil the party."

"I move that we give Grace Harlowe a special round of applause for being a heroine," cried Hippy. "Hurrah!"

His example was quickly followed and the noise of the cheering brought people to their doors to see what the excitement was about.

"Do stop," protested Grace. "People will begin asking all sorts of questions."

"Don't interfere with our simple pleasures," expostulated Hippy. "Let us howl in peace. High School yell next, please."

By the time the party had reached the center of the town where their ways parted, the shadow cast by the near accident had almost disappeared.

By eight o'clock that evening the last guest had arrived, and the Harlowe's hospitable home was the scene of radiant good cheer. Mrs. Gray, enthroned in a big chair in one corner of the drawing room, was in her element, and the young folks vied with each other in doing her homage. The sprightly old lady was never so happy as when surrounded by young folks. She had a word or smile for each one, and the new girls who had at first felt rather timid about meeting her, were soon entirely at ease in her presence.

The greater part of the furniture had been removed from the big living room and the floor had been crashed; while a string orchestra that made a specialty of playing for parties had been hired for the pleasure of those who cared to dance.

As dancing was the chief amusement at nearly all of the young people's parties in Oakdale, the floor was filled from the beginning of the first waltz until supper was announced. This was served at two long tables in the dining room, Mrs. Gray occupying the seat of honor at the head of one, and Miss Thompson, who

was a favorite at High School parties, the other. There were miniature ears of corn, turkeys, pumpkins and various other favors appropriate to Thanksgiving at each one's place. In the center of one table stood two dolls dressed in the style of costume worn by the Pilgrim fathers and mothers. They held a scroll between them on which was printed the Thanksgiving Proclamation. In the center of the other table were two dolls, one dressed in football uniform, a miniature football under its arm, while the other, dressed as a High School girl, held up a blue banner with O. H. S. on it in big, white letters.

This had been Grace's idea. She had dressed the dolls with the idea of contrasting the first Thanksgiving with that of to-day. There was a great craning of necks from those at the one table to see the central figures on the other, but soon every one settled down to the discussion of the dainties provided for them.

The supper ended with a toast to their young hostess, which was drunk standing, and then the guests repaired to the drawing room, where impromptu stunts were in order. Every one was obliged to do something, if only to make a remark appropriate to the occasion. Nora sang, Anne recited, Grace and Miriam did a Spanish dance that they had practised during vacation

with remarkable spirit and effect. Jessica was then detailed to play, and under cover of her music, Tom, Reddy, David and Hippy left the room, Tom returning presently to announce solemnly that an original one-act drama, entiled "The Suffragette," written by Mr. Wingate and presented by a notable cast, would be the next offering.

After a moment's wait, Hippy, Reddy and David appeared, and were greeted with shouts of laughter. Reddy minced along in a bonnet and skirt belonging to Mrs. Harlowe, while Hippy wore a long-sleeved gingham pinafore of Grace's, which lacked considerable of meeting in the back, and was kept on by means of a sash. After deliberately setting their stage in full view of the audience at one end of the room, the play began, with David as the meek, henpecked husband, Hippy as the neglected child, who wept and howled continuously, while Reddy played the unnatural wife and mother, who neglected her family and held woman's suffrage meetings in the street.

The dialogue was clever, and the action of the sketch so ridiculous that the audience laughed from the first line until the climax, especially when the suffragette was hustled off to jail by Tom Gray, in the rôle of a policeman, for disturbing the peace, while her husband and

child executed a wild dance of joy as she was hauled off the scene, protesting vigorously.

The applause was tremendous and the cast were obliged to bow their thanks several times before it subsided. Songs, speeches and recitations followed rapidly until everyone had contributed something in the way of a stunt. Then the guests formed two long lines from the living room straight through the big archway into the drawing room, and soon a Virginia reel was in full swing, led off by Mr. Harlowe and Mrs. Gray, who took her steps as daintily as when she had danced at her first party so many years before.

After the reel, the young folks romped through "Paul Jones," and then the party broke up, all declaring that never before had they had quite such a good time.

As Grace sleepily prepared for bed, she felt a little thrill of pride at the success of her party, and her only regret was the fact that of all those invited, Eleanor was the only one who had refused to be present.

CHAPTER XIV

ELEANOR FINDS A WAY

NOW that Thanksgiving was past, basketball became the topic of the hour. The juniors had accepted the challenge of the senior class, and had agreed to play them on Saturday, December 12, at two o'clock, in the gymnasium. Only two weeks remained in which to practise. Their sorority enthusiasm had so completely run away with them that they had even neglected basketball until now. Therefore Grace Harlowe's lost no time in getting Miss Thompson's permission to use the gymnasium, and promptly notified her team and the subs. to meet there, in gymnasium suits, prepared to play, that afternoon.

The instant the last bell sounded on lessons, ten girls made for their lockers, and fifteen minutes later the first team and the subs. were moving toward the gymnasium deep in the discussion of the coming game and their chances for success over their opponents.

A brief meeting was held, and the girls were assigned to their positions. Grace had fully intended that Miriam should play center, but when she proposed it, Miriam flatly refused to do so,

and asked for her old position of right forward.

"You are our captain," she declared to Grace, "and the best center I ever saw on a girls' team. It would be folly to change now. Don't you agree with me, girls?"

Nora was detailed as left forward, while Marian Barber and Eva Allen played right and left guards. The substitutes were also assigned their positions and practice began.

Before they had been on the floor twenty minutes the girls were thoroughly alive to the joy of the game and worked with the old-time dash and spirit that had won them the championship the previous year. Now that they were in harmony with each other, they played with remarkable unity, and after an hour's practice Grace decided that they were in a fair way to "whip the seniors off the face of the earth."

"I never saw you girls work better!" she exclaimed. "It will be a sorry day for the seniors when we line up on the twelfth."

"There'll be a great gnashing of senior teeth after the game," remarked Nora confidently.

"Do you know, girls," said Grace, as they left the gymnasium that afternoon, "I am sorry that Eleanor won't be peaceable. I wanted her to like every bit of our school life and thought she'd surely be interested in basketball. I sup-

pose she will stay away from the game merely because we are on the team. It is really a shame for her to be so unreasonable."

"Grace Harlowe, are you ever going to stop mourning over Eleanor?" cried Miriam impatiently. "She doesn't deserve your regret and is too selfish to appreciate it. I know what I am talking about because I used to be just as ridiculous as she is, and knowing what you suffered through me, I can't bear to see you unhappy again over some one who is too trivial to be taken seriously."

"You're a dear, Miriam!" exclaimed Nora impulsively.

It was the first time that the once haughty Miriam had ever referred publicly to past shortcomings, although from the time she and Grace had settled their difficulties at the close of the sophomore year, she had been a changed girl.

"Where are Anne and Jessica to-day?" asked Eva Allen.

"Anne and Jessica have refused point blank to honor us with their presence during practice," announced Nora. "I asked Jessica to-day, and she said that they didn't want to know how we intended to play, for then they could wax enthusiastic and make a great deal more noise. It is their ambition to become loud and loyal fans."

"What a worthy ambition," said Marian Barber, with a giggle. "They are such noisy creatures already."

There was more laughing at this, as Anne and Jessica were by far the quietest members of the sorority.

"Remember, we practise to-morrow after school," called Grace as she separated from her team at her street.

As she walked slowly down the quiet street, deep in thought, her ear caught the sound of an approaching automobile, and she looked up just in time to see Eleanor drive by in her machine. Grace nodded to her, but her salutation met with a chilly stare.

"How childish she is," thought Grace. "I suppose she thinks that hurts me. Of course it isn't exactly pleasant, but I'm going to keep on speaking to her, just the same. I am not angry, even if she is; although I have far greater cause to be."

But before the close of the week Grace was destined to cross swords with Eleanor in earnest, and the toleration she had felt was swallowed up in righteous indignation.

During the winter, theatrical companies sometimes visited Oakdale for a week at a time, presenting, at popular prices, old worn-out plays and cheap melodramas. These companies gave

daily matinées as well as evening performances, and the more frivolous element of High School girls had in time past occasionally "skipped school" to spend the afternoon in the theatre. By the girls, this form of truancy was considered a "lark," but Miss Thompson did not look at the matter in the same light, and disciplined the culprit so severely whenever she found this to be the cause of an afternoon's absence that the girls were slow to offend in this respect.

All this Eleanor had heard, among other things, from Edna Wright, but had paid little attention to it when Edna had told her. Directly after cutting Grace Harlowe, she had turned her runabout into Main Street, where a billboard had caught her eye, displaying in glaring red and blue lettering the fact that the "Peerless Dramatic Company" would open a week's engagement in Oakdale with daily matinées.

Eleanor's eyes sparkled. She halted her machine, scanning curiously the list of plays on the billboard. "The Nihilist's Daughter" was scheduled for Thursday afternoon, and Eleanor decided to go. She wasn't afraid of Miss Thompson. Then, possessed with a sudden idea, she laughed gleefully. At last she had found a way to effectually annoy the principal.

CHAPTER XV

A WOULD-BE "LARK"

ELEANOR SAVELL and the seven girls who formed their sorority were the first to enter the study hall on Tuesday morning. As soon as a girl from any of the three lower classes appeared she was approached by some of the former and a great deal of whispering and subdued laughter went on. A few girls were seen to shake their heads dubiously, and a number of those termed "grinds" were not interviewed. The majority, however, appeared to be highly delighted over what they heard, one group standing near one of the windows, of which Eleanor was the center, laughed so loudly that they were sent to their seats.

Among the number to whom nothing was said were the members of the Phi Sigma Tau, and as the morning advanced they became fully aware that something unusual was in the wind. Several times they caught sight of a folded paper being stealthily passed from one desk to another, but as to its contents they had no idea, as it was not handed to any one of them.

At recess there was more grouping and whispering, and Grace was puzzled and not a little

hurt over the way in which she and her friends were ignored. Such a thing had not happened since the basketball trouble the previous year.

"Eleanor started that paper, whatever it is," said Nora O'Malley to the Phi Sigma Tau, who stood in a group around her desk. "She was here when I came in this morning, and I was early, too. It is some masterpiece of mischief on her part, or she wouldn't take the trouble to get here on time."

"Here comes Mabel," said Jessica. "Maybe she has seen the paper. Mabel, dear, did you see that paper that has been going the rounds this morning?"

Mabel nodded.

"What was written on it, Mabel?" asked Grace curiously.

Mabel looked distressed for a moment then she said, "I wish I might tell you all about it, but I gave my word of honor before I read it that I wouldn't mention the contents to any one."

"Then, of course, we won't ask you," said Anne Pierson quickly. "But tell us this much —is it about any of us?"

"No," replied Mabel. "It isn't. It is something I was asked to sign."

"And did you sign it?" asked Jessica.

"I certainly did not," responded Mabel. "It

was——" she stopped, then flushed. She had been on the point of telling. "I am sorry I ever saw it," she continued. "I can't bear to have secrets and not tell you."

"That's all right, Mabel," said Marian Barber, patting her on the shoulder. "We don't want you to tell. If it doesn't concern us we don't care, do we, girls?"

"No, indeed," was the reply.

Just then the bell sounded and the girls returned to their seats with the riddle still unsolved. Nothing more was seen of the mysterious paper, and Grace came to the conclusion that it had been nothing important, after all.

On Wednesday, aside from a little more whispering and significant glances exchanged among the pupils, not a ripple disturbed the calm of the study hall. It was therefore a distinct and not altogether pleasant surprise when Miss Thompson walked into the room, dismissed the senior class and requested the three lower classes to remain in their seats.

After the seniors had quietly left the study hall, Miss Thompson stood gravely regarding the rows of girls before her. Her eyes wandered toward where Eleanor sat, looking bored and indifferent, and then she looked toward Grace, whose steady gray eyes were fixed on the principal's face with respectful attention.

"I don't believe Grace is guilty, at any rate," thought Miss Thompson; then she addressed the assembled girls.

"Something has come to my ears, girls," said the principal, "that I find hard to credit, but before you leave here this afternoon I must know who is innocent and who is guilty."

Miss Thompson paused and a number of girls stirred uneasily in their seats, while a few glanced quickly toward Eleanor, who was looking straight ahead, the picture of innocence.

"You all know," continued the principal, "that it is strictly forbidden for any pupil to absent herself from school for the purpose of attending a circus, matinée or any public performance of this nature. I have so severely disciplined pupils for this offence that for a long time no one has disobeyed me. I was, therefore, astonished to learn that a number of girls, regardless of rules, have taken matters into their own hands and have decided to absent themselves from school to-morrow in order to attend the matinée to be given in the theatre. Such a decision is worse than disobedience—it is lawlessness. Unless a severe example is made of the offenders, the standard of the school will be lowered. Therefore, I intend to sift this matter to the bottom and find out what mischievous influence prompted this act of insubordination.

"Report says that this movement originated in the junior class, and that a paper has been circulated and signed by certain pupils, who pledged themselves to play truant and attend the matinée to-morrow."

The eyes of Grace and her chums turned questioningly toward Mabel Allison, who nodded slightly in the affirmative.

So that was what all the whispering and mystery had meant. Grace inwardly congratulated herself on having kept clear of the whole thing. None of her friends were implicated, either. Even Mabel had refused to sign.

"I have dismissed the senior class, because I have been assured of their entire ignorance of the plot. What I insist upon knowing now, is who are the real culprits, beginning with the girl who originated the paper to the last one who signed it. I am going to put every girl on her honor, and I expect absolutely truthful answers. The girls who signed the paper I have mentioned will rise."

There was a moment of suspense, then Eleanor Savell proudly rose from her seat. Her example was followed, until two thirds of the girls present were standing. The principal stood silently regarding them with an expression of severity that was decidedly discomfitting.

"That will do," she said curtly, after they

had stood for what seemed to them an age, but was really only a couple of minutes.

"You may be seated. The girl who composed and wrote that agreement will now rise and explain herself."

Without hesitating, Eleanor rose and regarded the principal with an insolent smile. "I wrote it, Miss Thompson," she said clearly. "I wrote it because I wished to. I am sorry you found out about it, because it has spoiled all our fun."

There was a gasp of horror at Eleanor's assertion. No one had ever before spoken so disrespectfully to their revered principal.

"Miss Savell," said the principal quietly, although her flashing eyes and set lips showed that she was very angry, "if you have that paper in your possession, bring it to me at once, and never answer me again as you did just now. You are both disrespectful and impertinent."

But Miss Thompson's anger toward Eleanor was nothing compared with the tempest that the principal had aroused in Eleanor. The latter flushed, then turned perfectly white with rage. Still standing, she reached down, picked up a book from her desk and took from it a paper. "This," she said, in a low tense voice, "is the paper you wish to see. I do not choose to let you see it, therefore I shall destroy it."

Then she deliberately tore the offending paper into shreds and scattered them broadcast.

"I hope you understand that I am not afraid of you or any other teacher in this school," she continued. "I have never been punished in my life, therefore I am not liable to give you the first opportunity. I despise you, because you are a ridiculous prig, and I am glad of an opportunity to tell you so. As for the persons who told you about our plan, words cannot express my contempt for them, and right here I accuse Grace Harlowe and her sorority of getting the information from Mabel Allison yesterday and carrying it to you. They are all tale-bearers and sneaks."

With these words, Eleanor angrily flung the book she held on the desk and walked down the aisle toward the door, but Miss Thompson barred her way.

"Stop, Miss Savell," she commanded. "You shall not leave this room until you have apologized to the girls whom you have unjustly accused and to me. I will not tolerate such behavior."

Eleanor glared at the principal, whose face was rigid in its purpose, then sank into the nearest vacant seat, saying defiantly: "You may keep me here all night if you like, but, I meant what I said, and I shall retract nothing."

"I Do Not Choose to Let You See This Paper."

Nevertheless she did not again attempt to leave the room. She had met with a will stronger than her own and she realized it.

Ignoring Eleanor's final remark, Miss Thompson once more turned her attention to the matter in hand.

"Those girls who are not in any way implicated in this matter are dismissed," she said.

About one third of the girls arose and prepared to leave the study hall, the Phi Sigma Tau being among the number. Grace motioned the girls to hurry. She wished to leave the room with her friends before Miss Thompson noticed them. She knew the principal would insist on an apology from Eleanor, and neither she nor her friends wished it. For the first time since Eleanor had chosen to cut their acquaintance Grace was thoroughly angry with her. She could not forgive Eleanor for having accused her and her friends of carrying tales before almost the entire school; therefore a forced apology would not appease her wounded pride. She drew a breath of relief when the eight girls were safely outside the study hall door.

"Hurry up," she said. "We'll talk when we get outside school. Don't stop for a minute. If Miss Thompson notices that we are gone, she'll send after us."

The girls silently donned their wraps and fled from the building like fugitives from justice. Once on the street a lively confab ensued, all talking at once.

"Let's take turns talking," cried Grace, laughing. "We shall understand each other a little better."

"Now, what do you think of Miss Eleanor?" cried Nora. "She has certainly shown her true colors this time."

"I never heard of anything more unjust than the way she accused us, when we knew nothing about her old plan," said Marian Barber.

"It was abominable," said Eva Allen.

The other girls expressed their disapproval in equally frank terms.

"I suppose it did look as though I told you girls," said Mabel Allison, who had joined them at the gate. "You know I was with you at recess, right after the paper had been passed to me. I don't think Miss Savell intended me to see it. It was passed to me by mistake."

"Very likely," agreed Grace. "I wonder who did tell Miss Thompson. I saw several girls with the paper, but hadn't the remotest idea what it was all about. You know Miss Thompson is awfully down on 'skipping school.' She threatened last year to suspend Edna Wright for it."

"There will be weeping and wailing in the 'Skull and Crossbones' crowd,'" exclaimed Nora. "They are all in this mix-up, and if they aren't suspended, they'll be lucky."

"Are you going to stand up for Eleanor now, in the face of what she said about all of us before those girls, Grace?" asked Marian Barber hotly.

"No," said Grace shortly. "She deserves to be punished. "The things she said to Miss Thompson were disgraceful, and I shall never forgive her for the way she spoke of us."

"I wouldn't say that, Grace," remarked Anne. "You can never tell what may happen to change your views."

"It will have to be something remarkable in this instance," replied Grace grimly, as she bade the girls good-bye. "Remember, girls, basketball practice again to-morrow, and the rest of the week. Miss Thompson has promised me the gymnasium. Please make it a point to be on hand."

"Good-bye, Grace," chorused her friends, and went on down the street discussing the probable fate of the would-be truants.

* * * * * * * *

To return to those youthful transgressors. They were spending a most uncomfortable half hour with Miss Thompson. She was merciless in

her denunciation of their conduct, and the terror of suspension arose in more than one mind, as they listened to her scathing remarks. It had all seemed a huge joke when they planned it, but there was nothing funny about it now. When, with the exception of Eleanor, the principal dismissed them, they filed decorously out, very uneasy in mind. Miss Thompson had taken their names, but had not stated their punishment and it was certain that they would be made to feel the full weight of her displeasure.

When the last girl had disappeared the principal turned to Eleanor. "I will listen to your apology, Miss Savell," she said coldly.

Eleanor looked scornfully at the principal, and was silent.

"Do you intend to obey me, Miss Savell?" asked Miss Thompson.

Still there was no answer.

"Very well," continued Miss Thompson. "Your silence indicates that you are still insubordinate. You may, therefore, choose between two things. You may apologize to me now, and to-morrow to the girls you have accused of treachery, or you may leave this school, not to return to it unless permitted to do so by the Board of Education."

Without a word Eleanor rose and walked haughtily out of the room.

CHAPTER XVI

THE JUNIORS FOREVER

WHEN the four classes assembled Thursday morning, every girl, with the exception of Eleanor, was in her seat. Her absence created considerable comment, and it was a matter of speculation as to whether she had purposely absented herself or really had been suspended.

After conducting opening exercises, Miss Thompson pronounced sentence on the culprits. They were to forfeit their recess, library and all other privileges until the end of the term. They must turn in two themes every week of not less than six hundred words on certain subjects to be assigned to them. If, during this time, any one of them should be reported for a misdemeanor, they were to be suspended without delay.

Their penalty was far from light, but they had not been suspended, and so they resolved to endure it as best they might.

Grace Harlowe felt a load lifted from her mind when Miss Thompson publicly announced that she had not received any information from either Mabel Allison or the Phi Sigma Tau.

"Thank goodness, none of us were concerned in that affair," she told the members of her basketball team at recess. "There are two girls on the sophomore and three on the freshman team whose basketball ardor will have to cool until after the mid-year exams."

"You might know that some of those silly freshmen would get into trouble," said Nora scornfully.

"'Twas many and many a year ago,
In an age beyond recall,
That Nora, the freshman, lowly sat
At one end of the study hall."

recited Anne Pierson in dramatic tones.

There was a burst of laughter from the girls at this effusion, in which Nora herself joined.

"What a delicate way of reminding me that I once was a freshman!" she exclaimed.

"Anne has a new accomplishment," said Grace. "She can spout poetry without trying."

"Small credit is due me," said Anne, smiling. "Anyone can twist 'Annabel Lee' to suit the occasion."

"By the way, Anne," said Grace, "as you are a poet, you must compose a basketball song to-day, and I'll see that the juniors all have

copies. It's time we had one. Let me see what would be a good tune?"

" 'Rally Round the Flag,' " suggested Miriam Nesbit. "That has a dandy swing to it."

Grace hummed a few bars.

"The very thing," she exclaimed. "Now, Anne, get busy at once. You'd better sing the tune to yourself all the time you're writing it, then you'll be sure to put more dash and spirit into it."

"I wish the day of the game were here," said Jessica plaintively. "I have been practising a most encouraging howl. Hippy, David and Reddy have a new one, too. Reddy says it's 'marvelously extraordinary and appallingly great.' "

"I can imagine it to be all that and more if Hippy had anything to do with its origin," said Nora.

"Wasn't it nice of Miss Thompson to exonerate us publicly?" asked Anne.

"She is always just," replied Grace. "I can't understand how Eleanor could be so rude and disagreeable to her. She has disliked Miss Thompson from the first."

"I wonder whether she apologized to Miss Thompson last night," mused Grace.

"I feel sure that she didn't, and I am just as sure that she won't get back until she does."

"We shall manage to exist if she doesn't," said Jessica dryly. She felt a personal grudge against Eleanor for her accusation against Mabel, who had grown very dear to her and whom she mothered like a hen with one chicken.

"She'll probably appear at the game in all her glory," said Miriam Nesbit. "She can go to that, even though she is on bad terms with the school."

The recess bell cut short the conversation and the girls returned to their desks with far better ideas of the coming game than of the afternoon's lessons.

Saturday, December 12, dawned cold and clear, and the girls on both teams were in high spirits as they hustled into their respective locker-rooms and rapidly donned their gymnasium suits. The spectators had not yet begun to arrive, as it was still early, so the girls indulged in a little warming-up practice, did a few stunts and skipped about, overflowing with animal spirits.

Julia Crosby and Grace took turns sprinting around the gymnasium three times in succession, while Miriam Nesbit timed them, Grace finishing just two seconds ahead of Julia.

By a quarter of two the gallery was fairly well filled and by five minutes of two it was crowded. The juniors, with the exception of

Eleanor Savell's faction, arrived in a body, gave the High School yell the moment they spied their team, and then burst forth with the basket-ball song, led by Ruth Deane, a tall junior, who stood up and beat time with both hands. Anne had composed the song the week before. The juniors had all received copies of the words and had learned them by heart. They now sang with the utmost glee, and came out particularly strong on the chorus, which ran:

"The juniors forever, hurrah, fans, hurrah!
Our team is a winner, our captain's a star.
And we'll drive the senior foe, from the basket every time.
Shouting the war cry of the juniors."

There was a great clapping of hands from the admirers of the juniors at this effort, but the seniors promptly responded from the other end of the gallery to the tune of Dixie, with:

"The seniors are the real thing.
Hurrah! Hurrah!
Our gallant team now takes its stand,
And all the baskets soon will land.
We shout, we sing, the praises of the seniors."

Hardly had the last notes died away, when the

referee blew the whistle and the teams hustled to their positions. Grace and Julia Crosby faced each other, beamed amiably and shook hands, then stood vigilant, eyes on the ball that the referee balanced in her hands. Up it went, the whistle sounded and the two captains sprang straight for it. Grace captured it, however, and sent it flying toward Miriam, who was so carefully guarded that she dared not attempt to make the basket, and after a feint managed to throw it to Nora, who tried for the basket at long range and missed.

There was a general scramble for the ball, and for five minutes neither team scored; then Marian Barber dropped a neat field goal, and soon after Grace scored on a foul. The junior fans howled joyfully at the good work of their team. The seniors did not intend to allow them to score again in a hurry. They played such a close guarding game that, try as they might, the juniors made no headway. Then Julia Crosby scored on a field goal, making the score 3 to 2. This spurred the junior team on to greater effort, and Miriam made a brilliant throw to basket that brought forth an ovation from the gallery. This ended the first half, with the score 5 to 2 in favor of the juniors.

"They'll have to work to catch up with us now," said Nora O'Malley triumphantly to the

members of the team, who sat resting in the little side room off the gymnasium.

"We have the lead, but we can't afford to boast yet," replied Grace. "The seniors played a fine game last half, and they'll strain every nerve to pile up their score next half."

"We shall win," said Miriam Nesbit confidently. "I feel it in my bones."

"Let's hope that your bones are true prophets," laughed Marian Barber.

"O girls!" exclaimed Eva Allen from the open door, in which she had been standing looking up at the gallery. "Eleanor is here. She and her satellites are sitting away up on the back seat of the gallery."

"Where?" asked Nora, going to the door "Oh, yes, I see her. She looks as haughty as ever. It's a wonder she'd condescend to come and watch her mortal enemies play."

"I suppose she hopes we'll lose," said Marian Barber. "That would fill her with joy."

"Then we'll see that she goes away in a gloomy frame of mind," said Nora, "for we're going to win, and don't you forget to remember it."

Just then the whistle blew, and there was a scramble for places. This time Julia Crosby won the toss-up, and followed it up with a field goal. Then the seniors scored twice on fouls,

tying the score. The juniors set their teeth and waded in with all their might and main, setting a whirlwind pace that caused their fans to shout with wild enthusiasm and fairly dazed their opponents. Grace alone netted four foul goals, and the sensational playing of Nora and Miriam was a matter of wonder to the spectators, who conceded it to be the fastest, most brilliant half ever played by an Oakdale team. The game ended with the score 15 to 6 in favor of the juniors, whose loyal supporters swooped down upon them the moment the whistle blew and pranced about, whooping like savages.

"That was the greatest game I ever saw played under this roof," cried David, wringing Grace's hand, while Hippy hopped about, uttering little yelps of joy. Reddy circled about the victors almost too delighted for words. He was filled with profound admiration for them.

"The boys' crack team couldn't have played a better game," he said solemnly, and the girls knew that he could pay them no higher compliment, for this team was considered invincible by the High School boys.

"Perhaps we'll challenge you some day, Reddy," said Grace mischievously.

"I believe you'd win at that," he said so earnestly that every one laughed.

"It was a great triumph," said Jessica

proudly, as she stood with Mabel and Anne in the locker-room while the girls resumed street clothing. "And my new howl was a success, too."

"Glad to know that," said Grace. "There were so many different kinds of noises I couldn't distinguish it."

"There was one noise that started that was promptly hushed," said Anne. "You heard it, too, didn't you Jessica?"

"Oh, yes, girls, I intended telling you before this," replied Jessica. "Just before the last half started, Miss Thompson and Miss Kane came in and walked to the other end of the gallery. Well, Eleanor and her crowd saw them, and what do you suppose they did?"

"Hard to tell," said Nora.

"They hissed Miss Thompson. Very softly, you may be sure," continued Jessica, "but it was hissing, just the same. For a wonder, she didn't hear it, but every girl in the junior class did. They were sitting down front on the same side as Eleanor's crowd. You know what a temper Ruth Deane has and how ferocious she can look? Well, the minute she heard it she went back there like a flash, looking for all the world like a thunder cloud. She talked for a moment to Edna and Eleanor. They tossed their heads, but they didn't hiss any more."

"What did Ruth say to them?" asked Grace curiously. "It must have been something remarkable, or they wouldn't have subsided so suddenly."

"It was," giggled Jessica. "She told them that if they didn't stop it instantly, the juniors would pick them up bodily, carry them downstairs to the classroom and lock them in until the game was over."

"How absurd!" exclaimed Grace. "They would never have dared to go that far."

"I don't know about that," said Nora O'Malley. "Ruth Deane is a terror when she gets fairly started. Besides, she would have had both High Schools on her side. Even the boys like Miss Thompson."

"It was an effectual threat at any rate," said Jessica. "They left before the game was over. Perhaps they were afraid of being waylaid."

"I suppose they couldn't bear to see us win," said Grace. "But, O girls, I am so proud of our invincible team. It was a great game and a well-earned victory."

"We ought to celebrate," said Miriam. "Come on. Here we are at Stillman's."

Without waiting for a second invitation, the Phi Sigma Tau trooped joyfully into the drug store.

CHAPTER XVII

THE LAST STRAW

THE days glided by rapidly. The Christmas holidays came, bringing with them the usual round of gayeties. Thanks to the Phi Sigma Tau, the lonely element of High School girls did not lack for good cheer. As at Thanksgiving, each member of the sorority entertained two or more girls on Christmas and New Year's, and were amply repaid for their good deed by the warm appreciation of their guests.

Tom Gray came down for the holidays, bringing with him his roommate, Arnold Evans, a fair-haired, blue-eyed young man of twenty, who proved himself thoroughly likable in every respect. He lost no time in cultivating Miriam's acquaintance, and the two soon became firm friends.

Tom gave a dinner to his roommate, inviting "the seven originals," as he expressed it, and Miriam, who felt that at last she really belonged in the charmed circle. David was even more pleased than his sister over the turn affairs had taken. To have Miriam a member of his own particular "crowd" had always been David's

dearest wish, and the advent of Arnold Evans had done away with Miriam being the odd one. So the circle was enlarged to ten young people, who managed to crowd the two weeks' vacation with all sorts of healthful pleasures.

There were coasting and sleighing parties, and on one occasion a walk to old Jean's hut in Upton Wood, where they were hospitably entertained by the old hunter, who had smilingly pointed to the wolf skins on the wall, asking them if they remembered the winter day two years before when those same skins held wolves who were far too lively for comfort. Then the story of their escape had to be gone over again for Arnold's benefit.

They had stayed until the moon came up, and, accompanied by the old hunter, had walked back to Oakdale in the moonlight.

After the holidays came the brief period of hard study before the dreaded mid-year examinations. Basketball enthusiasm declined rapidly and a remarkable devotion to study ensued that lasted until examinations began. By the last week in January, the ordeal was past.

Eleanor Savell had not yet returned to school. Whether or not she would be allowed to return was a question that occasioned a great deal of discussion among three lower classes of girls. Edna Wright and the other members of the

sorority organized by Eleanor were loud in their expressions of disapproval as to Miss Thompson's "severity" toward Eleanor. They talked so freely about it, that it reached the principal's ears. She lost no time in sending for them, and after a session in the office, they emerged looking subdued and crestfallen; and after that it was noted that when in conversation with their schoolmates, they made no further allusion to Miss Thompson's methods of discipline.

There was a faint murmur of surprise ran around the study hall one morning, however, when Miss Thompson walked in to conduct the opening exercises, accompanied by Eleanor, who, without looking at the school, seated herself at the desk nearest to where the principal stood.

When the morning exercises were concluded, Miss Thompson nodded slightly to Eleanor, who turned rather pale, then rose, and, facing the school, said in a clear voice:

"I wish to apologize to Miss Thompson for impertinence and insubordination. I also wish to publicly apologize to the members of the Phi Sigma Tau for having accused them of treachery concerning a certain matter that recently came up in this school."

"Your apology is accepted, Miss Savell. You may take your own seat," said the principal.

Without looking to the right or left, Eleanor

walked proudly up the aisle to her seat, followed by the gaze of those girls who could not refrain from watching her. The Phi Sigma Tau, to a member, sat with eyes straight to the front. They had no desire to increase Eleanor's discomfiture, for they realized what this public apology must have cost her, although they were all equally puzzled as to what had prompted her to humble herself.

Eleanor's apology was not due, however, to a change of heart. She still despised Miss Thompson as thoroughly as on the day that she had manifested her open scorn and dislike for the principal.

As for Grace and her friends, Eleanor was particularly bitter against them, and laid at their door a charge of which they were entirely innocent.

Eleanor had told her aunt nothing of her recent trouble in school, but had feigned illness as an excuse for remaining at home. After attending the basketball game her aunt had told her rather sharply that if she were able to attend basketball games, she was certainly able to continue her studies. Eleanor had agreed to return to school the following Monday, and had started from home at the usual time with no intention whatever of honoring the High School with her presence. She passed the morn-

ing in the various stores, lunched in town and went to a matinée in the afternoon. In this manner she idled the days away until the holiday vacation came, congratulating herself upon her success in pulling wool over the eyes of her long-suffering aunt.

But a day of reckoning was at hand, for just before the close of vacation Miss Thompson chanced to call at Mrs. Gray's home while Mrs. Gray was entertaining Miss Nevin, and the truth came out.

When Miss Nevin confronted her niece with the deception Eleanor had practised upon her, a stormy scene had followed, and Eleanor had accused Grace Harlowe of telling tales to Mrs. Gray, and Mrs. Gray of carrying them to her aunt. This had angered Miss Nevin to the extent that she had immediately ordered Eleanor to her room without telling her from whom she had received her information.

For three days Eleanor had remained in her room, refusing to speak to her aunt, who, at the end of that time, decreed that if she did not at once apologize roundly and return to school her violin and piano would both be taken from her until she should again become reasonable.

In the face of this new punishment, which was the severest penalty that could be imposed upon

her, Eleanor remained obdurate. Her violin and piano were removed from her room and the piano in the drawing room was closed. Still she stubbornly held out, and it was not until the day before the beginning of the new term that she went to her aunt and coldly agreed to comply with her wishes, providing she might have her violin and piano once more.

Aside from this conversation they had exchanged no words, and Eleanor therefore entered school that morning still believing the Phi Sigma Tau to be at the bottom of her misfortune.

In spite of her recent assertion that she could not forgive Eleanor, Grace's resentment vanished at sight of her enemy's humiliation. A public apology was the last thing that either she or her friends desired. Her promise to Mrs. Gray loomed up before her. If Eleanor really did believe the Phi Sigma Tau innocent, then perhaps this would be the opportunity for reconciliation. After a little thought, she tore a sheet of paper from her notebook and wrote:

"Dear Eleanor:

"The members of the Phi Sigma Tau are very sorry about your having to make an apology. We did not wish it. We think you showed a great deal of the right kind of courage in making the public apology you did both to

Miss Thompson and to us. Won't you come back to the Phi Sigma Tau?

"Your Sincere Friends."

At recess Grace showed the note to her friends. She had signed her name to the note and requested the others to do the same. Here she met with some opposition. Nora, Marian Barber and Eva Allen were strongly opposed to sending it. But Jessica, Anne and Miriam agreed with Grace that it would be in fulfillment of the original promise to Mrs. Gray to help Eleanor whenever they could do so. So the Phi Sigma Tau signed their names and the note was passed to Eleanor directly after recess.

She opened it, read it through, and an expression of such intense scorn passed over her face that Nora, who sat near her and who was covertly watching her, knew at once that Grace's flag of truce had been trampled in the dust.

Picking up her pen, Eleanor wrote rapidly for a brief space, underlined what she had written, signed her name with a flourish, and, folding and addressing her note, sent it to Grace.

Rather surprised at receiving an answer so quickly, Grace unfolded the note. Then she colored, looked grave and, putting the note in the back of the text-book she was holding, went on studying.

By the time school was over for the day, the girls of the Phi Sigma Tau knew that Eleanor had once more repudiated their overtures of friendship and were curious to see what she had written.

"Don't keep us in suspense. Let us see what she wrote," exclaimed Nora O'Malley as the seven girls crossed the campus together.

"Here it is," said Grace, handing Nora the note.

Nora eagerly unfolded the paper and the girls crowded around, reading over her shoulder, Grace walking a little apart from them. Then Nora read aloud:

"To the Phi Sigma Tau:

"Your kind appreciation of my conduct in the matter of apology is really remarkable, coupled with the fact that your inability to refrain from discussing my personal affairs with Mrs. Gray forced this recent humiliation upon me. To ask me to return to your society is only adding insult to injury. I am not particularly surprised at this, however. It merely proves you to be greater hypocrites than you at first seemed.

"Eleanor Savell."

"Well, of all things!" exclaimed Marian Barber. "Grace Harlowe, if you ever attempt to conciliate her again, I'll disown you."

"What does she mean by saying that we discussed her affairs with Mrs. Gray?" cried Jessica impatiently. "We have always tried to put her best side out to dear Mrs. Gray, and you all know it."

"The best thing to do," said Anne, smiling a little, "is to tell Mrs. Gray all about it. We might as well live up to the reputation Eleanor has thrust upon us. It isn't pleasant to admit that we have failed with Eleanor, but it isn't our fault, at any rate. I am going there this afternoon. I'll tell her."

"May I go with you, Anne?" asked Grace.

"You know I'd love to have you," Anne replied.

"As long as I was the first to agree to look out for Eleanor, I have decided I had better be with you at the finish," said Grace, as the two girls walked slowly up the drive.

" 'The finish?' " asked Anne. "Why do you say that, Grace?"

"You've heard about the last straw that broke the camel's back, haven't you?" asked Grace. "Well, Eleanor's note is the last straw. I know I said that once before, and I broke my word. I don't intend to break it again, however. I am going to ask Mrs. Gray to release me from my promise."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PLAY'S THE THING

EXCITEMENT ran high in the three lower classes one morning in early February when Miss Thompson requested that those interested in the production of a Shakespearian play go to the library directly after school, there to discuss the situation.

When the gong sounded dismissal, about sixty girls with dramatic aspirations made for the library. The Phi Sigma Tau entered in a body. They had decided at recess to carry away as many laurels as possible, providing they could get into the cast.

Miss Tebbs, teacher of elocution; Miss Kane, teacher of gymnastics, and Miss Thompson stood at one side of the library talking earnestly as they noted each newcomer.

"Oh, look!" whispered Jessica, clutching Nora's arm. "There's Eleanor and her crowd."

"Then look out for squalls," replied Nora. "She'll try to be the whole cast, and will get a magnificent case of sulks if she can't have her own way."

"Sh-h-h," warned Eva Allen. "She'll hear

you. Besides, Miss Thompson is going to speak."

The principal held up her hand for silence and the groups of girls engaged in subdued conversation ceased talking and turned their attention toward her.

"You are all aware that each year the senior class gives a play, which they choose, manage and produce with no assistance save that given by Miss Tebbs," said the principal. "So far the three lower classes have never given a play. Some time ago Miss Tebbs suggested that as we need money for special books in the library which our yearly appropriation does not cover, we might present a Shakespearian play with good effect, choosing the cast from the freshman, sophomore and junior classes.

"The first thing to be thought of is the play itself. After due consideration, we decided that 'As You Like It' is better suited to our needs than any of the other Shakespearian dramas. In it are twenty-one speaking characters, besides numerous lords, pages and attendants. We shall probably use about fifty girls, thus making it an elaborate production. By the attendance this afternoon I should imagine that you are heartily in favor of our project and that we shall have no trouble in making up the cast. As Miss Tebbs has charge of the situation, I yield the floor to

her. She will explain to you about the giving out of the parts."

There was an enthusiastic clapping of hands as Miss Thompson smiled and nodded to the girls, then left the room. Miss Tebbs then stated that on Friday afternoon after school there would be a "try out" for parts in the gymnasium, in order to find out what girls were most capable of doing good work in the cast. Just what the test would be had not been decided. It would be well, however, to study the chosen play and become familiar with it; also each girl must bring a copy of the play with her. If the girls wished to ask any questions, she would answer them as far as possible. Miss Kane would help with the posing and coaching when the thing was fairly started.

The girls crowded around Miss Tebbs and Miss Kane, asking all sorts of questions.

"One at a time, girls," laughed Miss Tebbs. "I have not asked you to enact a mob scene."

Under cover of the confusion, Grace and her three friends slipped out of the library.

" 'The play's the thing,' " quoted Nora, "and me for it."

"That is for the judges to decide," said Jessica sagely. "Perhaps they won't even look at you."

"Do you think any one could see my Irish

countenance and fail to be impressed?" demanded Nora.

"Really and truly, Nora, the more you travel with Hippy, the more you talk like him," remarked Grace.

"I consider that a compliment," replied Nora, laughing. "Hippy says awfully funny things."

"Look at our little Anne," said Jessica. "She is actually dreaming. Tell us about it, dear."

"I was thinking of the play," said Anne dreamily. "I do so want a part, if only a little one."

"You'll be chosen for Rosalind, see if you aren't," predicted Grace.

"Oh, no," said Anne. "Some one else will be sure to get that. Besides, I'm too short."

"But, Anne, you've had stage experience," said Jessica. "You ought to get it."

"Not in a Shakespearian play," replied Anne, shaking her head. "I might not do well at all with that kind of part."

"Never fear, you'll be the star before you know it," said Nora.

By Friday, there was nothing on the school horizon save the cherished play. Before school, at recess, and even in classes it was the topic of the hour. To the eager girls the day seemed particularly long, and a heartfelt sigh went up when the dismissal gong rang.

As the four chums hurried toward the gymnasium, Anne suddenly caught Grace by the arm with a faint gasp of surprise. Glancing quickly down at her friend to ascertain the cause of Anne's sudden agitation, Grace saw her friend's eyes following the figure of a tall, distinguished-looking man who was just disappearing down the corridor leading to the gymnasium.

"What's the matter, Anne?" asked Grace. "Do you know that man?"

"No," replied Anne, "but I know who he is."

"He must be a remarkable person, considering the way you gasped and clutched me," laughed Grace.

"That man is Everett Southard, the great Shakespearian actor," said Anne almost reverently. "I saw him in 'Hamlet' and his acting is wonderful."

"No wonder you were surprised," said Grace.

"It fairly takes my breath. I've seen ever so many pictures of him and read magazine articles about him. What do you suppose he is doing in Oakdale, and at the High School—of all places?"

"Time will tell," said Nora. Then she suddenly clasped her hands. "O girls, I know! He's here for the try-out!"

"Why of course he is," exclaimed Grace. "Now I remember Miss Tebbs showed me a magazine picture of him one day last year, and told me that she had known him since childhood. Besides, he is playing a three-night engagement in Albany. I read it in the paper last night. It's as plain as can be. Miss Tebbs has asked him to run up here and pick out the cast."

"Good gracious," said Jessica. "I shall retire in confusion if he looks at me. I won't dare aspire to a part now, and I had designs on the part of Phebe."

"Don't be a goose," said Nora. "He's only a man. He can't hurt you. I think having him here will be a lark. Won't some of those girls put on airs, though. There he is talking with Miss Tebbs now."

The girls entered the gymnasium to find there nearly all of those who had attended the first meeting in the library increased by about a score of girls who had decided at the last minute to try for parts. Eleanor stood at one end of the great room, with Edna Wright and Daisy Culver. Grace thought she had never seen Eleanor looking more beautiful. She was wearing a fur coat and hat far too costly for a school girl, and carried a huge muff. Her coat was thrown open, disclosing a perfectly tailored gown of brown, with trimmings of dull gold

braid. She was talking animatedly and her two friends were apparently hanging on every word she uttered.

"No wonder Eleanor has an opinion of herself," said Nora. "Look at Daisy and Edna. They act as though Eleanor were the Sultan of Turkey or the Shah of Persia, or some other high and mighty dignitary. They almost grovel before her."

"Never mind, Nora," said Grace. "As long as you retain your Irish independence what do you care about what other girls do?"

"I don't care. Only they do act so silly," said Nora, with a sniff of contempt.

"Sh-h-h!" said Jessica softly. "Miss Tebbs is going to call the meeting to order."

A hush fell over the assembled girls as Miss Tebbs stepped forward to address them.

"I am very glad to see so many girls here," she said. "It shows that you are all interested in the coming play. Although you cannot all have parts, I hope that you will feel satisfied with the selection made this afternoon. In order that each member of the cast may be chosen on her merit alone, my old friend, Mr. Southard, kindly consented to come from Albany for the sole purpose of giving us the benefit of his great Shakespearian experience. Allow me to introduce Mr. Everett Southard."

He was greeted with a round of applause, and after bowing his thanks, the eminent actor plunged at once into the business at hand.

He spoke favorably of the idea of an all-girl cast, saying that each year many girls' colleges presented Shakespearian plays with marked success. The main thing to be considered was the intelligent delivery of the great dramatist's lines. The thing to do would be to find out what girls could most ably portray the various characters, it would be necessary to try each girl separately with a few lines from the play. In order to facilitate matters, he suggested that those girls who really desired speaking parts step to one side of the room, while those who wished merely to make the stage pictures, step to the other.

Out of the eighty girls, about thirty-five only stepped over to the side from which the principal characters were to be chosen. Many of the girls had no serious intentions whatever regarding the play, and the awe inspired by Mr. Southard's presence made them too timid to venture to open their mouths before him. Jessica, whose courage had fled, would have been among the latter if Nora had not seized her firmly by the arm as she prepared to flee and marched her over with the rest of the Phi Sigma Tau. Eleanor and Edna Wright were

among the junior contestants, while there was a good showing of sophomores and freshmen.

Mr. Southard took in the aspirants with keen, comprehensive glance. His eyes rested a shade longer on Eleanor. She made a striking picture as she stood looking with apparent indifference at the girls about her. Then his quick eye traveled to Grace's fine face and graceful figure, and then on to Anne, whose small face was alive with the excitement of the moment.

A breathless silence had fallen over the room. Every eye was fixed on the actor, who stood with a small leather-covered edition of "As You Like It" in his hand. Miss Tebbs stood by with a pencil and pad. The great try-out was about to begin.

CHAPTER XIX

THE TRY OUT

"WILL the young lady on the extreme right please come forward?" said Mr. Southard pleasantly, indicating Marian Barber, who rather timidly obeyed, taking the book he held out to her. At his request, she began to read from Orlando's entrance, in the first scene of the fourth act. She faltered a little on the first two lines, but shortly regained her courage and read on in her best manner. When she had read about a dozen lines he motioned for her to cease reading, said something to Miss Tebbs, who made an entry on her pad, and beckoned to the girl next to Marian to come forward.

Straight down the line he went, sometimes stopping a girl at her third or fourth line, rarely allowing them to read farther than the eleventh or twelfth.

Nora was the second Phi Sigma Tau to undergo the ordeal. As she briskly delivered the opening lines, the actor stopped her. Taking the book from her, he turned to the part where Touchstone, quaintly humorous, holds forth upon "the lie seven times removed."

"Read this," he said briefly, holding out the book to Nora.

Nora began and read glibly on, unconsciously emphasizing as she did so. Down one page she read and half way through the next before Mr. Southard seemed satisfied.

Then he again held conversation with Miss Tebbs, who nodded and looked smilingly toward Nora, who stood scowling faintly, rather ill-pleased at attracting so much attention.

"It looks as though Nora had made an impression, doesn't it?" whispered Jessica to Grace, who was about to reply when Mr. Southard motioned to her. Grace, who knew the scene by heart, went fearlessly forward, and read the lines with splendid emphasis. Marian and Eva Allen followed her, and acquitted themselves with credit. Then Eleanor's turn came. Handing her coat, which she had taken off and carried upon her arm, to Edna Wright, she walked proudly over, then, without a trace of self-consciousness, began the reading of the designated lines. Her voice sounded unusually clear and sweet, yet lacked something of the power of expression displayed by Grace in her rendering of the same scene. When she had finished she handed the book back with an air of studied indifference she was far from feeling. She had decided in her own mind that Rosalind

was the part best suited to her, and felt that the honor now lay between herself and Grace. No other girls, with the exception of Nora, had been allowed to read as much of any scene as they two had been requested to read.

But Eleanor had reckoned without her host, for there was one girl who had not as yet come to the front. The girl was Anne Pierson, who in some mysterious manner had been all but overlooked, until Miss Tebbs spied her standing between Grace and Nora.

"Can you spare us a moment more, Mr. Southard?" said Miss Tebbs to the actor, who was preparing to leave. "You have almost missed hearing one of my best girls. Come here, Anne, and prove the truth of my words."

Grace drew a long breath of relief. She had eagerly awaited Anne's turn and was about to call Miss Tebbs's attention to Anne, just as that teacher had observed her.

As most of the girls present had heard Anne recite, there was a great craning of necks and a faint murmur of expectancy as she took her place. They expected her to live up to her reputation and she had scarcely delivered the opening line before they realized that she would not disappoint them.

Her musical voice vibrated with expression and the mock-serious bantering tones in which

she delivered Rosalind's witty speeches caused Mr. Southard to smile and nod approvingly as she gave full value to the immortal lines. Her change of voice from Rosalind to Orlando was wholly delightful, and so charmingly did she depict both characters that when she ended with Orlando's exit she received a little ovation from the listening girls, in which Mr. Southard and Miss Tebbs joined.

"She's won! She's won! I'm so glad," Grace said softly to Nora and Jessica. "I wanted her to play Rosalind, and I knew she could do it. Look, girls! Mr. Southard is shaking hands with her."

True enough, Anne was shyly shaking hands with the great actor, who was congratulating her warmly upon her recent effort.

"I have never before heard an amateur read those lines as well as you have to-day, Miss Pierson," he said. "I am sure Rosalind will be safe with you, for few professional women could have done better. If I am anywhere near here when your play is enacted, I shall make it a point to come and see it."

Shaking hands warmly with Miss Tebbs and bowing to the admiring girls, Mr. Southard hurriedly departed, leaving his audience devoured with curiosity as to the chosen ones.

Anne stood perfectly still, looking rather

dazed. The unexpected had happened. She was to have not only a part, but the best part, at that. The girls gathered eagerly about her, congratulating her on her success, but she was too overcome to thank them, and smiled at them through a mist of tears.

"Look at Eleanor," whispered Nora to Grace. "She's so angry she can't see straight. She must have wanted to play Rosalind herself. I told you she'd sulk if she couldn't be the leading lady."

Grace glanced over toward Eleanor, who stood biting her lip, her hands clenched and her face set in angry lines.

"She looks like the 'Vendetta' or the 'Camorra' or some other Italian vengeance agency, doesn't she?" said Nora with a giggle.

Grace laughed in spite of herself at Nora's remark, but regretted it the next moment, for Eleanor saw the glances directed toward her and heard Nora's giggle. She turned white and half started toward Grace, then stopped, and, turning her back upon the Phi Sigma Tau, began talking to Edna Wright.

Just then Miss Tebbs, who had been busy with her list, announced that she would now name the cast, and all conversation ceased as by magic.

Miriam Nesbit was intrusted with the "Duke,"

while Marian Barber was to play "Frederick," his brother. Jessica was in raptures over "Phebe," while Nora had captured "Touchstone," Eva Allen, "Audrey," and, to her great delight, Grace was told that she was to play "Orlando," with Eleanor as "Celia." The other parts were assigned among the sophomores and freshmen who had made the best showing, Mabel Allison getting the part of Jaques.

"You will report for rehearsal next Tuesday afternoon after school, when typewritten copies of your parts will be handed you," said Miss Tebbs, as she was about to leave the room.

The moment Miss Tebbs ceased talking the girls began, as they gathered in little groups around the lucky ones and gave vent to their feelings with many exclamations of approval and congratulation. Several girls approached Eleanor, but she fairly ran from them and hurried out of the gymnasium after Miss Tebbs with Edna Wright and Daisy Culver at her heels.

"There goes Eleanor after Miss Tebbs," observed Marian Barber. "What do you suppose she's up to now?"

"Oh, never mind her," said Nora impatiently. "You'll see enough of her during rehearsal. It will be so pleasant to rehearse with her, considering that she isn't on speaking terms with any of us."

Had the girl chums known then what Eleanor "was up to," it would have been a matter of surprise and indignation to all of them. After imperiously commanding her satellites to wait for her in the corridor, Eleanor overtook Miss Tebbs just outside Miss Thompson's office.

"I want to speak to you, Miss Tebbs," said Eleanor as the teacher paused, her hand on the doorknob.

"Well, what can I do for you, Miss Savell?"

"I want to speak to you about the play. I wish to play Rosalind," said Eleanor with calm assurance.

"But, my dear child, Anne Pierson is to play Rosalind," replied Miss Tebbs. "Mr. Southard particularly commended her work. Did you not hear what he said?"

"Oh, yes; I heard him complimenting her," replied Eleanor complacently, "but I feel sure that I can do more with it than she can. I did not do my best work to-day. Besides, Miss Pierson is too short. I am certain of making a better appearance."

"What you say about appearance is quite true, Miss Savell," replied Miss Tebbs frankly. "Beyond a doubt you would make a beautiful Rosalind; but I am convinced that no other girl can enact the part with the spirit and dash that Miss Pierson can. Your part of Celia is

very well suited to you, and you can win plenty of applause playing it. You must understand, however, that once having given out a part, I should not attempt to take it from the girl I had given it to simply because some other girl desired it. That would be both unfair and unjust. The only thing I could promise you would be to allow you to understudy Rosalind in case anything happened to Miss Pierson. Would you care to understudy the part?"

Eleanor was silent for a moment. Miss Tebbs, looking a trifle impatient, stood awaiting her reply.

"I should like to do that," Eleanor said slowly, a curious light in her eyes. "Thank you very much, Miss Tebbs."

"You are welcome," replied the teacher. "Be sure and be prompt at rehearsal next Tuesday."

As Miss Tebbs entered the office, Eleanor turned and walked slowly down the corridor.

"So Miss Tebbs thinks I ought to be satisfied with 'Celia,'" she muttered. "Very well, I'll rehearse Celia, but I'll understudy Rosalind, and it will be very strange if something doesn't happen to Miss Pierson.

CHAPTER XX

THE ANONYMOUS LETTER

AFTER the parts had been given out, rehearsals for the play went merrily on. There were many hitches at first, but finally things settled down to smooth running order, and as the time for its presentation approached Miss Tebbs had good reason to feel jubilant. Each girl seemed bent on distinguishing herself, and that teacher was heard laughingly to declare that she had an "all star cast."

In spite of rehearsals, Grace Harlowe's team found time for a few basketball games, and whipped the senior team twice in succession, much to the disgust of Captain Julia Crosby, who threatened to go into deep mourning over what she called "her dead and gone team." She even composed a mournful ditty, which she sang in their ears in a wailing minor key whenever she passed any of them, and practically tormented them, until they actually did win one hard-fought victory over the juniors, "just to keep Julia from perpetrating her eternal chant," as one of them remarked.

Eleanor had outwardly settled down to the routine of school work in a way that surprised

even her aunt. But inwardly she was seething with rebellion toward Miss Thompson and hatred of the Phi Sigma Tau. She had fully determined that Anne Pierson should never play Rosalind, and had hit upon a plan by which she hoped to accomplish her ends. The Phi Sigma Tau were completely carried away with Anne's impersonation of Shakespeare's heroine, and any blow struck at Anne would be equally felt by the others. Anne had been absent from one rehearsal and thus Eleanor had had an opportunity to show her ability. She had done very well and Miss Tebbs had praised her work, though in her secret heart Eleanor knew that Anne's work was finer than her own. But the means of gratifying her own personal vanity blinded her to everything except the fact that she wanted to play Rosalind regardless of Anne's superior ability.

To settle Miss Thompson was not so easy a matter, and though Eleanor racked her brain for some telling method of vengeance, no inspiration came until one afternoon in early March. Professor La Roche, irritated to the point of frenzy, ordered her from his class, with instructions to report herself to Miss Thompson. As she entered the open door of the principal's office she noticed that the room was empty of occupants. She stopped, hesitated, then went

softly in, a half-formed idea in her mind that did not at first assume definite shape.

"If Miss Thompson comes in, I suppose I shall have to report myself," thought Eleanor. "While I'm here, I'll just look about and see if I can't find some way to even up that public apology she made me make."

Gliding over to the open desk, she ran her eye hastily over the various papers spread out upon it. At first she found nothing of importance, but suddenly she began to laugh softly, her face lighted with malicious glee.

"Here's the wonderful paper that Miss Tabby Cat Thompson is going to read before the 'Arts and Crafts Club' to-morrow," she murmured. "I heard her telling Miss Chester about it yesterday. She said it took her six weeks to prepare it on account of the time she spent in looking up her facts. It will take me less than six minutes to dispose of it."

Seizing the essay with both hands, she tore it across, and then tore it again and again, until it was literally reduced to shreds. These she gathered into a heap and left in the middle of the desk. Glancing about to see that no one was near, she was about to step into the corridor when she heard the sound of approaching footsteps. Quick as a flash she flung open the door of the little lavatory just outside the office

and concealed herself just as a girl turned from the main corridor into the short passage leading to the principal's office. Eleanor, holding the door slightly ajar, peered stealthily out at the new-comer, who was none other than Grace Harlowe.

Having no recitation that hour, Grace had run up to the office to obtain Miss Thompson's permission to use the gymnasium that afternoon for basketball practice. A hasty glance inside the office revealed to Grace that the principal was not there. She hesitated a moment, walked toward the desk, then turned and went out again.

The moment she turned the corner, Eleanor darted out of the lavatory and fled down the corridor, just as the bell rang for the end of the period. In a moment the main corridor was filled with girls from the various classrooms, and, joining them, Eleanor entered the study hall without reporting her dismissal from French class.

She was somewhat nervous and trembled a little at the thought of her near discovery, but felt not the slightest qualm of conscience at her ruthless destruction of another's property. On the contrary, she experienced a wicked satisfaction, and smiled to herself as she pictured Miss Thompson's consternation when the latter should discover her loss. Best of all, the

principal would never find out who did it, for Eleanor vowed never to admit her guilt.

She decided to go at once to Professor La Roche and apologize, so that he would not report her to Miss Thompson. Without a doubt an effort would be made to find the culprit, and if it were proven that she did not return to the study hall as soon as dismissed from French, she might be asked to account for it, and thus call down suspicion upon herself.

On her way to rhetoric recitation, she stopped at Professor La Roche's door, greatly astonishing him by a prettily worded apology, which he readily accepted and beamed upon her with forgiving good-nature. Feeling that she had bridged that difficulty, Eleanor entered the classroom to find Miss Thompson talking in low, guarded tones to Miss Chester, who looked both shocked and surprised. She caught the words "entirely destroyed," "serious offence" and "investigate at once." Then the principal left the room and Miss Chester turned to the class and began the recitation.

To Eleanor's surprise, nothing was said of the matter that day. School was dismissed as usual, and the girls went out without dreaming that on the morrow they would all be placed under suspicion until the person guilty of the outrage was found.

The following morning, after opening exercises, Miss Thompson stated briefly the destruction of her paper.

"I was out of my office barely ten minutes," she said, "yet when I returned some one had ruthlessly torn the essay to bits and left the pieces piled in the middle of my desk. As I had spent considerable time and research in getting the subject matter together, the destruction of the paper is particularly annoying. Whoever was contemptible enough to engage in such mischief must have known this. It looks like a deliberate attempt to insult me. It is hard to believe one of my girls guilty, yet it is not probable that any one outside could be responsible. A girl who would wilfully do such a thing is a menace to the school and should be removed from it. I am not going to any extreme measures to find the miscreant. Were I to question each girl in turn I fear the offender might perjure herself rather than admit her guilt. But I am confident that sooner or later I shall know the truth of the matter."

As Miss Thompson concluded, she looked over the roomful of girls who sat watching her with serious faces. Which one of them was guilty? Time alone would tell.

At recess that morning the subject of the play was for once forgotten in the excitement oc-

casioned by the principal's recent disclosure. Groups of girls indignantly denied even the thought of such mischief.

"I don't believe Miss Thompson would ever suspect us of any such thing," remarked Jessica to her friends.

"Of course not, goose," replied Grace. "She knows us too well for that."

But it was with a peculiar apprehension of something unpleasant that Grace answered a summons to the principal's office just before school closed for the day.

"Grace," she said, as the young girl entered the office, "were you in my office yesterday afternoon between half past one and a quarter of two?"

"Why, yes, Miss Thompson. I came to ask permission to use the gymnasium, but you were out, so I came back and asked you just before school closed."

"Yes, I remember that you did," replied the principal. "However, I want you to read this."

Grace took the paper, looking rather perplexed, and read:

"Ask Miss Harlowe what she was doing in your office between half past one and a quarter of two yesterday."

"A Passerby."

"Why—why——" stammered Grace, her eyes growing large with wonder. "I don't understand. I came here at that time, for I looked at the clock as I came in, but I was only here for a second."

Then the truth dawned upon her. "Why, Miss Thompson," she cried, "you surely don't think I tore up your essay?"

"No, Grace, I don't," replied the principal. "But I believe that the one who wrote this note is the one who did do it, and evidently wishes to fasten the guilt upon you. It looks to me as though we had a common enemy. Do you recognize either the paper or the writing?"

"No," replied Grace slowly, shaking her head. "Vertical writing all looks alike. The paper is peculiar. It is note paper, but different from any I ever saw before. It looks like——"

She stopped suddenly, a shocked look creeping into her eyes.

"What is it, Grace?" said Miss Thompson, who had been closely watching her.

"I—just—had a queer idea," faltered Grace.

"If you suspect any one, Grace, it is your duty to tell me," said the principal. "I cannot pass lightly over such a piece of wanton destruction. To clear up this mystery, should be a matter of vital interest to you, too, as this letter is really an insinuation against you."

Grace was silent.

"I am waiting for you, Grace," said the principal. "Will you do as I wish?"

The tears rushed to Grace's eyes. "Forgive me, Miss Thompson," she said tremulously, "but I can tell you nothing."

"You are doing wrong, Grace, in withholding your knowledge," said the older woman rather sternly, "and I am greatly displeased at your stubbornness. Ordinarily I would not ask you to betray any of your schoolmates, but in this instance I am justified, and you are making a serious mistake in sacrificing your duty upon the altar of school-girl honor."

"I am sorry, Miss Thompson," said Grace, striving to steady her voice. "I value your good opinion above everything, but I can tell you nothing you wish to know. Please, please don't ask me."

"Very well," responded the principal in a tone of cold dismissal, turning to her desk.

With a half-stifled sob, Grace hurried from the room. For the first time, since entering High School, she had incurred the displeasure of her beloved principal, and all for the sake of a girl who was unworthy of the sacrifice. For Grace had recognized the paper. It was precisely the same style of paper on which Eleanor Savell had declined her Thanksgiving invitation.

CHAPTER XXI

BREAKERS AHEAD

THE dress rehearsal for "As You Like It" was over. It had been well nigh perfect. The costumes had for the most part been on hand, as the senior class of five years previous had given the same play and bequeathed their paraphernalia to those who should come after. Rosalind's costumes had to be altered to fit Anne, however, on account of her lack of stature. Also the lines in the text where Rosalind refers to her height underwent some changes. The final details having been attended to, Miss Tebbs and Miss Kane found time to congratulate each other on the smoothness of the production, which bade fair to surpass anything of the kind ever before given. There was not a weak spot in the cast. Anne's work had seemed to grow finer with every rehearsal.

She had won the repeated applause of the group of teachers who had been invited to witness this trial performance. Grace, Nora, Eleanor and Miriam had ably supported her and there had been tears of proud joy in Miss Tebbs's eyes as she had watched the clever and spirited acting of these girls.

"Be sure and put your costumes exactly where they belong," called Miss Tebbs as the girls filed off the stage into the dressing room after the final curtain. "Then you will have no trouble to-morrow night. We want to avoid all eleventh-hour scrambling and exciting costume hunts."

Laughing merrily, the girls began choosing places to hang their costumes in the big room off the stage where they were to dress. Anne, careful little soul that she was, piled her paraphernalia neatly in one corner, and taking a slip of paper from her bag wrote "Rosalind" upon it, pinning it to her first-act costume.

"The eternal labeler," said Nora, with her ever-ready giggle, as she watched Anne. "Are you afraid it will run away, little Miss Fussbudget?"

"No; of course not," said Anne, smiling. "I just marked it because——"

"You have the marking habit," finished Jessica. "Come on, girls. Don't tease Anne. Let her put tags on herself if she wants to. Then a certain young man who is waiting outside for her will be sure to recognize her. Has anyone seen that Allison child? It's time she put in an appearance."

"Just listen to Grandmother Bright," teased Anne. "She is hunting her lost chick, as usual."

With merry laugh and jest the girls prepared for the street. Grace and her friends were among the first to leave, and hurried to the street, where the boys awaited them.

"Hurrah for the only original ranters and barnstormers on exhibition in this country," cried Hippy, waving his hat in the air.

"Cease, Hippopotamus," said Nora. "You are mistaken. We are stars, but we shall refuse to twinkle in your sky unless you suddenly become more respectful."

"He doesn't know the definition of the word," said David.

"How cruelly you misjudge me," said Hippy. "I meant no disrespect. It was a sudden attack of enthusiasm. I get them spasmodically."

"So we have observed," said Nora dryly. "Let's not stand here discussing you all night. Come on up to my house, and we'll make fudge and have things to eat."

"I have my car here," said David. "Pile into it and we'll be up there in a jiffy."

"It's awfully late," demurred Grace. "After ten o'clock."

"Never mind that," said Nora. "Your mother knows you can take care of yourself. You can 'phone to her from my house."

In another minute the young people had seated themselves in the big car and were off.

"Did you see Eleanor's runabout standing there?" Nora asked Grace.

"Yes," replied Grace. "I was rather surprised, too. She hasn't used it much of late."

"How beautiful she looked to-night, didn't she?" interposed Jessica.

"Are you talking of the would-be murderess, who froze us all out Thanksgiving Day?" asked Hippy. "What is her latest crime?"

Grace felt like saying "Destroying other people's property and getting innocent folks disliked," but refrained. She had told no one of her interview with Miss Thompson. Grace knew that the principal was still displeased with her. She was no longer on the old terms of intimacy with Miss Thompson. A barrier seemed to have sprung up between them, that only one thing could remove, but Grace was resolved not to expose Eleanor—not that she felt that Eleanor did not richly deserve it, but she knew that it would mean instant expulsion from school. She believed that Eleanor had acted on the impulse of the moment, and was without doubt bitterly sorry for it, and she felt that as long as Eleanor had at last begun to be interested in school, the thing to do was to keep her there, particularly as Mrs. Gray had recently told her of Miss Nevin's pleasure at the change that the school had apparently wrought in Eleanor.

Could Grace have known what Eleanor was engaged in at the moment she would have felt like exposing her without mercy.

During the first rehearsals Grace, secretly fearing an outbreak on Eleanor's part, had been on the alert, but as rehearsals progressed and Eleanor kept strictly to herself, Grace relaxed her vigilance.

Directly after the chums had hurried out of the hall to meet the boys, Miss Tebbs had decided that opening the dressing room on the other side of the stage would relieve the congestion and insure a better chance for all to dress. Calling to the girls who still remained to move their belongings to that side, Miss Tebbs hurried across the stage to find the janitor and see that the door was at once unlocked. By the time the door was opened and the lights turned on the remaining girls flocked in, their arms piled high with costumes.

Foremost among them was Eleanor. Hastily depositing her own costumes in one corner of the dressing room, she darted across the stage and into the room from which she had just moved her effects.

It was empty. She glanced quickly about. Like a flash she gathered up a pile of costumes marked "Rosalind," covered them with her long fur coat and ran through the hall and down

the steps to where her runabout was stationed. Crowding them hastily into the bottom of the machine, she slipped on her coat, made ready her runabout and drove down the street like the wind, not lessening her speed until she reached the drive at "Heartsease."

* * * * * * * *

The young people passed a merry hour at Nora's, indulging in one of their old-time frolics, that only lacked Tom Gray's presence to make the original octette complete.

"We'll be in the front row to-morrow night," said Hippy, as the young folks trooped out to the car. "I have engaged a beautiful bunch of green onions from the truck florist, Reddy has put all his money into carrots of a nice lively color, the exact shade of his hair, while I have advised Davy here to invest in turnips. They are nice and round and hard, and will hit the stage with a resounding whack, providing he can throw straight enough to hit anything. He can carry them in a paper bag and——"

But before he could say more he was seized by David and Reddy and rushed unceremoniously into the street, while the girls signified their approbation by cries of "good enough for him" and "make him promise to behave to-morrow night."

"I will. I swear it," panted Hippy. "Only

don't rush me over the ground so fast. I might lose my breath and never, never catch it again."

"Oh, let him go," said Nora, who had accompanied them down the walk. "I'll have a private interview with him to-morrow and that will insure his good behavior."

"Thank you, angel Nora," replied Hippy gratefully. "You will be spared any obnoxious vegetables, even though the others may suffer."

"For that you walk," said David, who had dropped Hippy and was engaged in helping the girls into the machine.

"Never," replied Hippy, making a dive for the automobile. "I shall sit at the feet of the fair Jessica. Reddy will be so pleased."

"Every one ready?" sang out David, as he took his place at the wheel after cranking up the machine.

"All ready, let her go," was the chorus, and the machine whizzed down the street.

CHAPTER XXII

AS YOU LIKE IT

THE big dressing rooms on each side of the stage at Assembly Hall were ablaze with light. There was a hum of girlish voices and gay laughter, and all the pleasant excitement attending an amateur production prevailed. The dressing had been going on for the last hour, and now a goodly company of courtiers and dames stood about waiting while Miss Tebbs and Miss Kane rapidly "made up their faces" with rouge and powder. This being done to prevent them from looking too pale when in the white glare of the footlights.

Miriam Nesbit as the "Duke" looked particularly fine, and the girls gathered around her with many exclamations of admiration. Nora's roguish face looked out from her fool's cap in saucy fashion as she flitted about jingling her bells. Grace made a handsome Orlando, while Jessica looked an ideal shepherdess.

"Where's Anne?" said Grace as Nora paused in front of her. "I haven't see her to-night. I suppose she's over in the other dressing room. Miss Tebbs said that some of the costumes were moved over there after we left last night. What

time is it? I didn't wear my watch to-night because I didn't want to risk losing it."

"It's almost half past seven," said Jessica. "I asked Miss Tebbs for the time just a few minutes ago."

"Let's go and find Anne at once, then," said Nora. "It's getting late, and she surely is dressed by this time. Then we'll look through the hole in the curtain at the house. People are beginning to arrive."

"Wait a minute," said Jessica. "There's Mabel. Doesn't she look great as Jaques? Come here, dear," called Jessica.

Mabel Allison joined the three girls, who hurried across the stage to the other dressing room in search of Anne Pierson.

"Why, I don't see her here," cried Grace, making a quick survey of the room. "She must be somewhere about, for——"

"There she goes now," exclaimed Nora, who stood in the door, looking out on the stage, "and she has her hat and coat on. How strange. I wonder if she knows how late it is?"

Sure enough, Anne was hurrying toward the opposite dressing room.

The three girls made a rush for her.

"Why, Anne," said Grace. "What is the matter? We thought you had dressed over here and were looking for you."

"Girls," replied Anne, "I've been on a wild-goose chase. I can't stop to tell you about it now, but you shall hear as soon as I have a chance. Will you help me with my costume and make-up? I'm awfully late, and haven't a minute to spare."

"Why of course we will," said Grace. "Give me your hat and coat, dear. Where did you put your costumes? It won't take you long to dress, for most of the girls are dressed and over on the other side, so you have the place to yourself."

"Over in that corner," replied Anne, taking off her collar and unfastening her white shirt waist. "Don't you remember, I labeled them and you laughed at me for doing so?"

"Of course we do," said Nora, making a dive for the corner where Anne had piled her costumes the previous night. "They're not here," she announced after a brief but thorough search. "Miss Tebbs must have had them moved to the other room. She opened it last night after we left. Grace, you help Anne, and Jessica and Mabel and I will run across and look for them." With these words, Nora was off, the other two girls at her heels.

"Tell me what kept you, Anne," said Grace, as the latter began arranging her hair for the first act.

"Grace," said Anne rather tremulously, "I won't wait until the others come back to tell you why I came so late. Just after I had finished my supper and was putting on my wraps a boy came to the door with this note." Anne went over to where her coat hung and took out an envelope. Drawing a note from it, she silently handed it to Grace, who read:

"My Dear Anne:

"Will you come up to my house before going to the hall? I wish to give you something to wear in the play.

"Yours affectionately,

"Rose R. Gray."

"Why, how unlike Mrs. Gray to send for you at the eleventh hour," said Grace in a puzzled tone. "No wonder you were late. What did she give you?"

"Nothing," replied Anne. "It was a trick. She never wrote the note, although the writing looks like hers, and so does the paper. She was very indignant over it and sent me back in the carriage, telling the coachman to return for her, for of course she will be here to-night. I would have arrived much later if I had been obliged to walk. I ran almost all the way up there. You know Chapel Hill is quite a distance from my house."

"I should say so," replied Grace. "Who could have been so mean? Anne, why do you suppose——" Grace stopped suddenly and stared at Anne. "Anne do you think that Eleanor could have written it?" she said slowly, as though reluctant to give voice to her suspicion.

"I am afraid so," replied Anne. "She is the only one who could profit by my being late. Yet if she did write the note, she should have realized that going to Mrs. Gray's would scarcely keep me away long enough to miss my first entrance. You know I don't come on until the second scene."

"There is something more behind this," said Grace, "and I'm going to find out, too." She darted to the door and opened it upon Nora and Jessica, who were on the threshold.

"We can't find them," they cried in alarm, "but we told Miss Tebbs and she'll be here in a minute."

"We didn't say a word to any one else," said Nora, "because they must be somewhere about, and there is no use in stirring up a lot of unnecessary excitement."

"Wise little Nora," said Grace, patting her on the shoulder. "Here comes Miss Tebbs now." She stepped courteously aside to allow the teacher to enter the dressing room, then, following her, closed the door.

"What is this I hear about losing your costumes, Anne?" asked Miss Tebbs rather impatiently. "I cautioned the girls last night about taking care of their things."

Anne flushed at the teacher's curt tones.

"I put them all in that corner, plainly marked, before I left here last night," she answered. "When I came here to-night they were gone."

"That is strange," said the elder woman. "Have you made a thorough search for them in the other room?"

"We've gone over every inch of the ground," exclaimed Jessica, "and we can't find a trace of them. We didn't ask any of the girls about them, because if we couldn't find them we feel sure the others couldn't. So we just kept quiet."

"I don't know what is to be done, I'm sure," said Miss Tebbs in an anxious tone. "It is eight o'clock now and the curtain is supposed to run up at 8.15. I can hold it until 8.30, but no longer. The house is already well filled. You might get through the first act in a borrowed gown, Anne, but what can you do in the second? You know how that costume had to be altered to fit you. If it can be found before the second act, all will be well, but suppose you go on in the first act, and it can't be found, what then? You will spoil the whole production by

appearing in an incorrect or misfit costume, besides bitterly disappointing the two girls who will have to give up their costumes to you. It is doubly provoking, because Mr. Southard is here to-night, and is particularly anxious to see your work."

"Miss Tebbs," exclaimed Grace, "Eleanor Savell has a complete 'Rosalind' outfit. She had it made purposely. One of the girls told me so. You know she understudies Anne. Couldn't Anne use that?"

"Impossible, Grace," said Miss Tebbs. "Eleanor is taller than Anne. Anne's lack of height is her one drawback. If she had not shown such exceptional talent, 'Rosalind' would have certainly fallen to Miss Savell or yourself. I am very sorry, but it looks as though Miss Savell will have to play Rosalind after all, and she must be notified at once."

The three chums turned to Anne, who was biting her lip and trying hard to keep back her tears. Nora and Jessica looked their silent sympathy, but Grace stood apparently wrapped in thought.

Miss Tebbs moved toward the door, but as she placed her hand on the knob Grace sprang eagerly forward.

"Miss Tebbs," she cried, "don't ask Miss Savell. I believe I can find those costumes yet.

Wait here and in five minutes I'll tell you whether I have succeeded. Please don't ask me what I am going to do. Just trust me and wait. You will let me try, won't you?" she pleaded.

"Certainly, my child," said Miss Tebbs, "but remember time is precious. I'll give you five minutes, but if——"

"I'll be back in that time," cried Grace, and was gone, leaving Miss Tebbs and the three chums mystified but faintly hopeful.

Across the stage she flew and into the other dressing room. The object of her search was not there. Out she rushed and collided with a girl who was about to enter.

"Pardon me," said Grace, glancing up, then seized the girl by the arm. "Eleanor Savell," she exclaimed sternly. "You know where Anne's costumes are. Don't attempt to deny it."

Eleanor looked contemptuously at Grace and tried to shake herself free, but Grace's grasp tightened.

"Answer me," she said. "Where are they?"

"Let me go," said Eleanor angrily. "You are hurting my arm. What do I care about Miss Pierson's costumes?"

"You will care," replied Grace. "For if you don't instantly tell me where they are, I shall call the whole cast and expose you."

"If you do, you will merely make yourself

"Where Are Anne's Costumes?" Cried Grace.

ridiculous," hissed Eleanor, her eyes blazing. "What grounds have you for such an accusation?"

"I can't prove that you are responsible for their disappearance, but I do know that you shall not play 'Rosalind,' if the costumes are never found."

"How can you prevent me?" asked Eleanor in insolent tones. "You are not running this production."

"I have no time to waste in arguing the matter," returned Grace with admirable self-control. "What I want is the truth about the costumes and you must answer me."

" 'Must,' " repeated Eleanor, raising her eyebrows. "That is putting it rather strongly. No one ever says 'must' to me."

"I say it to you now, Eleanor, and I mean it," said Grace. "I am fully convinced that you have hidden Anne's costumes and I am equally certain that you are going to produce them at once."

"Then you are laboring under a delusion," replied Eleanor, with a disagreeable laugh, "and I should advise you to devote that tireless energy of yours, to minding your own business."

"This is my business," replied Grace evenly, "and if you wish to avoid any unpleasantness you will make it yours."

"Your threats do not alarm me," sneered Eleanor. "I am not easily frightened."

"Very well," replied Grace, looking steadily at her enemy. "I see that I shall be obliged to call Miss Thompson back here and tell her who destroyed her essay. Knowing that, do you suppose you can make her believe that you did not hide Anne's costumes?"

Eleanor's insolent expression turned to one of fear. "No," she gasped, "don't call Miss Thompson. You know she hates me, and will disgrace me in the eyes of the girls."

"And you richly deserve it, Eleanor," replied Grace, "but if you produce Anne's costumes at once, I'll agree to say nothing. Hurry, for every second is precious."

"I can't get them," wailed Eleanor. "What shall I do?"

"Where are they?" asked Grace, with compressed lips.

"At—'Heartsease,'" said Eleanor, and burst into tears.

"Oh, what a mess," groaned Grace. "It will take an hour to go there and back. Oh, I must act quickly. Let me think. Mrs. Gray's coachman would drive me out, but those horses are so slow. Eleanor," she exclaimed, turning to the weeping girl, "is your runabout outside?"

"Yes," sobbed Eleanor.

"Then that settles it," cried Grace. "I will go after the things. Tell me where to find them. Have you a latch key? I can't bother to ring after I get there."

"I'll go and get my key," said Eleanor, wiping her eyes. "They're in the wardrobe in my bedroom."

"All right, wait for me at the door and don't say a word. Here come some of the girls."

Though the time had seemed hours to Grace, her interview with Eleanor had lasted barely five minutes. She hurried back to where Miss Tebbs and the three chums awaited her, followed by the curious eyes of a number of the cast, who wondered vaguely why Grace Harlowe was rushing around at such a rate.

"Borrow a gown for Anne, Miss Tebbs, for the first act," she cried. "I'll have the missing costumes here in time for the second. Only I can't play Orlando. Miriam will have to play it; she's my understudy, you know. Ethel Dumont can play Miriam's part. They've rehearsed both parts, and will be all right. Please don't refuse me, Miss Tebbs, but let me go. It's for Anne's sake. Nora, please bring me my street clothes."

As she spoke, Grace began rapidly divesting herself of her costume.

"Very well, Grace, have your own way," re-

plied the teacher reluctantly. "I'll go at once and get a gown for Anne. But don't dare to fail me."

"Thank you, Miss Tebbs. I'll not fail." Slipping into her long coat and seizing her fur hat, Grace made for the street, stopping for an instant to take the key from Eleanor, who stood waiting at the door.

"Can you manage the machine?" faltered Eleanor.

"Yes," said Grace curtly. "Go in at once. If you are seen, the girls are apt to ask questions that you may find hard to answer truthfully."

"Thank goodness, David and Tom taught me something about automobiles last summer," thought Grace as she prepared to start, "or I should have been powerless to help Anne tonight. I am going to exceed the speed limit, that's certain." A moment later she was well into the street and on her way to "Heartsease." It was a memorable ride to Grace. It seemed as though the runabout fairly flew over the ground.

"I've only been ten minutes on the way," she breathed as she neared her destination. Leaving the runabout outside the grounds, she ran up the drive, and, inserting her key in the door, opened it softly and entered the wide, old-fashioned hall. Up the steps she hurried, meet-

ing no one, for Miss Nevin was at Assembly Hall and the servants' quarters were at the back of the house. Knowing the house as she did, Grace went straight to Eleanor's room and to the wardrobe. Sure enough, Anne's missing costumes were lying in a neat heap on the floor. Assuring herself that everything was there, Grace piled them up in her arms and sped softly down the stairs, opened the door, and in a twinkling was down the drive and into the runabout.

She drove back even faster than she had come. As she passed the city hall clock she drew a breath of relief. It was ten minutes of nine. The first act was hardly half over. Leaping from the machine with the lost costumes she ran triumphantly into the dressing room.

"Here she is," shrieked Nora in delight. "I knew she'd make good."

"Are they all there, Grace," anxiously inquired Miss Tebbs. "You dear, good child. Where did you find them?"

"That is a mystery which even Sherlock Holmes can never solve," replied Grace, laughing. "Where's Anne?"

"She's on just now with Celia," replied Miss Tebbs, "and is playing up to her usual form, but she is very nervous and almost broke down after you left. She feels that you made too great a sacrifice for her in giving up your part."

"Nonsense," said Grace. "Why should I have sacrificed the star to my own personal vanity? Miriam Nesbit can play Orlando as well as I, and makes a more striking appearance at that."

"I don't agree with you, Grace, for you were an ideal 'Orlando,'" replied Miss Tebbs. "However it's too late for regret, and the best I can do now is to make you assistant stage manager. Some of those girls need looking after. Miss Savell had a bad case of stage fright and almost had to be dragged on. She forgot her lines and had to be prompted. She's all right now, but I am devoutly thankful she didn't play 'Rosalind,' for she certainly would not have done justice to it."

Grace smiled grimly as she listened to Miss Tebbs. She could not feel sorry at Eleanor's recent agitation. Now that the excitement was over, Grace felt her anger rising. Eleanor's thirst for glory and revenge had been the means of losing Grace the part that she had so eagerly looked forward to playing, not to mention the narrow escape Anne had run. Still, on the whole, Grace felt glad that so far no one knew the truth.

"I think I'll go into the wings. It's almost time for the curtain," she said to Miss Tebbs. But before she could reach there, the curtain had

rung down and the audience were calling for Celia and Rosalind, who took the call hand in hand. Then Rosalind took two calls and bowed herself into the wings and straight into Grace's arms.

"O Grace," how could you do it?" said Anne, with a half sob. "You gave up your part for me. It's too much. I shan't——"

"You shall," replied Grace, hugging her. "Run along and put on male attire. I found your stuff and some time I'll tell you where, but not now."

The play progressed with remarkable smoothness, and the various actors received unstinted applause from the audience, but from first to last Anne was the star. Her portrayal of Rosalind left little to be desired. Time after time Mr. Southard led the applause, and was ably seconded by Hippy, Reddy, David and Tom, who fairly wriggled with enthusiasm.

Next to Anne, Nora, perhaps, came second. Her delivery of Touchstone's lines was delightful and she kept the audience in a gale of mirth whenever she appeared.

It was over at last. The closing line of the Epilogue had been spoken by Rosalind, and she had taken five curtain calls and retired with her arms full of flowers. The principal actors in the play had been well remembered by friends,

and the dressing rooms looked like a florist's shop.

"I'm so sorry. I'd like to begin all over again," said Nora, as she rubbed her face with cold cream to take off her make-up.

"There's an end to all things," said Jessica practically, "and really I'm glad to get back into everyday clothes."

"Hurry up, slowpokes," said Grace Harlowe, popping her head in the door. "Tom Gray is here. He and David are waiting outside with their cars. We are all going up to Nesbit's for a jollification given in honor of Rosalind, who is at present dressed in everyday clothes and shaking hands with the great Southard. He and Miss Tebbs are going, too, and so is Mrs. Gray."

"Come in, Grace, and tell us where you found Anne's costumes," said Nora, giving her cheeks a final rub. "We're devoured with curiosity."

" 'Thereby hangs a tale,' " replied Grace, "but I refuse to be interviewed to-night. I'll see you outside. If you're not there in three minutes, I'll put Hippy on your trail."

Closing the door, Grace walked slowly toward the entrance. The majority of the girls had gone. Anne still stood talking with Mr. Southard and Miss Tebbs.

"Grace, come here and speak to Mr. South-

ard," called Miss Tebbs. "Has Nora gone? Mr. Southard wishes to congratulate her and you, too."

"She'll be out in a couple of minutes," said Grace, as she advanced to greet the great actor. "But I am not in line for congratulations, as I was not in the play."

"I am very sorry that you could not play Orlando to-night. I remember your work at the try-out," said Mr. Southard in his deep, musical voice. "Miss Tebbs has told me of the sacrifice you made. You deserve double congratulations for the part you played behind the scenes."

"It was nothing," murmured Grace, her color rising. "If you are ready, suppose we go. Mrs. Gray wishes you and Mr. Southard to go in her carriage, Miss Tebbs. The rest of us will go in the two automobiles."

As they moved toward the door, Grace left them. Going back to the dressing room, she rapped sharply on the door. "Last call! Look out for Hippy!" she cried, then hurried to catch up with the others. But before she reached them she was confronted by Eleanor.

"I've been waiting to see you ever since the play was over," said Eleanor sullenly.

Grace looked at her in silence. "Well?" she said coldly.

"What are you going to do about to-night—and everything?" asked Eleanor. "Are you going to tell Miss Thompson?"

"So far I have told nothing, Eleanor," said Grace sternly. "You deserve no clemency at my hands, however, for you have repeatedly accused myself and my friends of carrying tales. Something we are above doing. You have refused our friendship and have been the means of estranging Miss Thompson and myself.

"When first you came to High School, I promised Mrs. Gray that I would help you to like High School life. For that reason I have overlooked lots of things, but to-night caps the climax, and I tell you frankly that I thoroughly despise your conduct, and if ever again you do anything to injure myself or my friends, I shall not hesitate to bring you to book for it."

Eleanor stood clenching her hands in impotent rage. Grace's plain speaking had roused a tempest in her."

"I hate you, Grace Harlowe, fifty times more than ever before," she said, her voice shaking with anger. "I intended to leave this miserable school at the end of the year, but now I shall stay and show you that you cannot trample upon me with impunity."

Without answering, Grace walked away, leaving Eleanor to stare moodily after her.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE JUNIOR PICNIC

WITH the first days of spring, the longing to throw down her books and fairly live in the open returned to Grace Harlowe with renewed force.

"I do wish school were over," she said with a sigh to her three chums, as they strolled home one afternoon in May. "I don't mind studying in the winter, but when the spring comes, then it's another matter. I long to golf and play tennis, and picnic in the woods and——"

"That reminds me," said Nora, interrupting her, "that last fall the juniors talked about giving a picnic instead of a ball. We didn't give the ball, so it's up to us to go picnicking."

"That's a fine suggestion, Nora," said Jessica. "I move we post a notice in the locker-room and have a meeting to-morrow after school.

"I can't be there," said Anne regretfully. "To-morrow is one of my days at Mrs. Gray's, but whatever you do will suit me."

"Awfully sorry, Anne," said Grace. "We might call it for the day after to-morrow."

"No, no," protested Anne. "Please don't postpone it on my account."

The notice was duly posted in a conspicuous place in the locker-room the next day, and the entire class, with the exception of Anne, met in one of the smaller rooms off the gymnasium at the close of the afternoon session.

"Esteemed juniors and fellow-citizens," said Grace, after calling the meeting to order. "It is true that no one has particularly requested me to take charge of this meeting, but as I posted the notice, I feel that I am responsible for your presence here to-day. We have before us two matters that need attention. One is the annual entertainment that the junior class always gives, the other the election of class officers. Last year we gave a ball, but this year so far we have done nothing. I move that we proceed at once to elect our president, vice president, secretary and treasurer, and then decide what form of entertainment would be advisable."

"Second the motion," said Nora.

"All those in favor say 'aye,' contrary, 'no.'"

"Carried," said Grace, as no dissenting voices arose. "Nominations for president are now in order."

"I nominate Grace Harlowe for president," exclaimed Miriam Nesbit, springing from her seat.

"Second the motion," said Eva Allen.

It was carried with enthusiasm before Grace had time to protest.

"I nominate Miriam Nesbit for president," said Grace.

This was also seconded and carried. Then Edna Wright rose and nominated Eleanor Savell. This closed the nominations for president, and the matter when put to vote resulted in Grace's election by a majority of ten votes over Miriam, Eleanor having received only five. It was plain to be seen that in spite of the rival faction, Grace held first place in the hearts of most of her class. Miriam Nesbit was elected vice president, Marian Barber treasurer, and, rather to Grace's surprise, Eleanor was chosen as secretary, Edna Wright again nominating her after doing some vigorous whispering among the two back rows of girls. The only other girl proposed being one who was not particularly popular in the class.

"I always suspected Edna Wright's lack of sense," whispered Nora to Jessica. "The idea of nominating Eleanor for secretary when she knows how Eleanor hates the Phi Sigma Tau, and doesn't speak to any of us. I certainly didn't vote for her."

"Nor I," responded Jessica. "Funny Grace would never tell us about that costume business. I know Eleanor was mixed up in it."

"Of course," nodded Nora, and turned her attention to the meeting just in time to hear Grace put the motion for the picnic and say "aye" with the others.

The date for the affair was set for the following Saturday, the weather permitting, and it was generally agreed that Forest Park, a natural park about twelve miles from Oakdale, would be an ideal place to picnic. A refreshment committee was appointed, also a transportation committee. The girls were requested to pay fifty cents apiece to the treasurer.

"If we find that this is not enough, we will levy another tax," Grace announced.

"I'm not positive about the first collection," muttered Nora. "I'm perpetually broke."

"So am I," said Jessica. "My allowance lasts about two days, and then I am penniless for the rest of the month."

The details having been disposed of, the members decided to meet in front of the High School the following Saturday morning at nine o'clock. The transportation committee was to have two big picnic wagons in readiness and the juniors went home with pleasant anticipations of a day in the woods.

"Won't it be fun?" exclaimed Grace joyously, as she walked down the street, the center of the Phi Sigma Tau.

"Great," said Miriam Nesbit. "I suppose we could all squeeze into David's automobile.

"I believe we'd better not," replied Grace. "It might create bad feeling among the girls. We don't want them to feel that we think ourselves too exclusive to ride with them."

"I'll wager anything Eleanor and Edna won't go with the crowd," said Eva Allen.

"I don't know about that," remarked Nora O'Malley. "Eleanor has just been elected secretary, therefore it behooves her to keep on the right side of those who elected her."

"She owes her office to Edna Wright," said Marian Barber, "and also to the fact that her opponent, Miss Wells, is not popular. For my part, I think Miss Wells would have been a better secretary. We could at least have gotten along peaceably with her. I can't see why Eleanor accepted, knowing she would have to act with us in class matters."

"I have noticed that ever since the play she has been trying to gain a footing in the class," said Miriam Nesbit thoughtfully. "She has gone out of her way to be nice to girls that she used to snub unmercifully. We are the only ones she keeps away from. I believe she will try to influence the rest of the class against us."

"She'll have to hurry up if she does it this term," said Nora.

"Perhaps she won't come back to school next year, she is so changeable," said Jessica hopefully.

"Yes, she will," said Grace, taking part in the discussion for the first time since it had touched on Eleanor.

"How do you know?" was the question.

"She told me so the night of the play," was Grace's answer. "Girls, I have never told you about what happened that night. Anne knows, but, you see, it particularly concerned her. I was too angry at the time to trust myself to tell any one else. As members of the same sorority, I know that you can be trusted not to repeat what I shall tell you."

In a few words Grace told the story of Eleanor's treachery, omitting, however, the part concerning Miss Thompson. She had decided to reveal that to no one.

"Well, of all things," said Nora O'Malley. "I knew she was to blame. So she threatened revenge, did she?"

"Yes," replied Grace. "That is why I have told you this. Be careful what you do. Never give her a chance to take advantage of you in any way, for she is determined to make mischief. Now let us forget her, and talk about the picnic."

With the talk of the picnic, Grace's warning soon passed from the girls' minds. They had

no knowledge of the trials that their senior year was to bring them or how fully the truth of Grace's words was to be proved.

* * * * * * * *

The day of the picnic dawned fair and cloudless. By nine o'clock a merry party of laughing, chattering girls had gathered in front of the High School, where the two immense wagons generally used by Oakdale picnickers, each drawn by four horses, awaited them. For a wonder every one was on time, and the start was made with a great fluttering of handkerchiefs, accompanied by enthusiastic cheers and High School yells. As they rattled down the street people paused and looked smilingly after them. Oakdale was very proud of her High School boys and girls, and enjoyed seeing them happy.

The Phi Sigma Tau were seated in one end of the second wagon, with the exception of Grace, who had perched herself on the driver's seat, and was holding an animated conversation with the driver, old Jerry Flynn, whom every one knew and liked. Grace always cultivated old Jerry's acquaintance whenever she had the chance. To-day he was allowing her to drive, while, with folded hands, he directed her management of the lines. Grace was in her element and gave a sigh of regret as they sighted the

park. "I could go on driving four horses forever, Mr. Flynn," she exclaimed. "Do let me drive going back?"

"Sure yez can, miss," said the good-natured Irishman, "and it's meself'll hellup yez, and show yez how to do it."

The committee on entertainment had provided a series of races and contests for the morning. After lunch there would be a tennis match, and then the girls could amuse themselves as they chose; the start home to be made about six o'clock.

Grace and Nora decided to enter the hundred-yard dash. "The prize is a box of stationery bought at the ten-cent store, so I am anxious to win it," Nora informed them. "In fact, all the prizes came from that useful and overworked place. I was on the purchasing committee."

"I shall enter the one-legged race. I always could stand on one foot like a crane," announced Jessica, "and hopping is my specialty."

There was an egg and spoon race, a walking match, an apple-eating contest, with the apples suspended by strings from the low branch of a tree, to be eaten without aid from the hands, and various other stunts of a similar nature.

The morning passed like magic. Each new set of contestants seemed funnier than the preceding one. Nora won the coveted box of sta-

tionery. Jessica ably demonstrated her ability to outhop her competitors, while Eva Allen covered herself with glory in the apple contest.

Grace, after losing the hundred-yard dash, laughingly refused to enter the other contests. "I mean to win at tennis this afternoon," she said, "so I'm not going to waste my precious energy on such little stunts."

After the midday luncheon had been disposed of, the entire class repaired to the tennis court at the east end of the park. A match had been arranged in which Grace and Miriam Nesbit were to play against Ruth Deane and Edna Wright, who was an indefatigable tennis player, and therefore figured frequently in tennis matches held in Oakdale. At the last minute, however, Edna pleaded a severe headache and recommended Eleanor in her place.

"But I never have played with her," protested Ruth Deane, "and how do I know whether she can play?"

"Try her," begged Edna. "I have played with her and she is a wonder."

It was with considerable surprise and some misgiving that Grace discovered that Eleanor was to play. "I seem fated to oppose her," Grace thought. "I wonder at her consenting to play against us. I'll keep my eye on her, at any rate, for I don't trust her."

Grace's fears were, in this instance, groundless, for Eleanor played a perfectly fair game from start to finish, and proved herself a powerful antagonist. Her serves were as straight and accurate as a boy's, and she played with great spirit and agility. Indeed, the sides were so evenly matched that junior excitement rose high and numerous boxes of Huyler's were wagered against the result. The game stood forty-all. Two vantages scored in succession were needed by one side to win. Grace forgot everything but the fact that she desired the victory. With her, going into a game meant winning it. Five minutes later the match was over. She and Miriam had won against worthy opponents.

"That was an evenly matched game," exclaimed Nora, as Grace and Miriam strolled to where their friends were seated upon the grass. "You played like professionals."

"Eleanor is a better player than Edna Wright," said Grace. "Her serves are wonderful. We had all we could do to hold our own."

"There's a trout brook over there," said Nora, "and I had forethought enough to borrow a fishing rod and line from Hippy. It is jointed, so it didn't get in any one's way. I left it with the lunch baskets. Therefore, as I'm not afraid of angle worms, I'm going to dig some bait and fish. Want to come?"

"Not I," laughed Anne. "Miriam and I are going up under the trees and read Browning."

"The idea of going to a picnic and reading!" exclaimed Jessica. "Come on, girls, let's go with Nora." She hastily rose, brushed off her gown and followed in Nora's wake, accompanied by Eva and Marian.

"Come with us, dear," said Anne to Grace, who stood looking dreamily toward a patch of woods to the left.

"No indeed," replied Grace. "I'm going to explore a little in those woods yonder."

"Don't go far," called Anne anxiously, as Grace turned to go.

"I won't," she answered. "See you later."

As she reached the cool shadows of the little strip of woods she drew a long breath. How delightful it was to hear the rustle of the leaves over her head, and tread upon Nature's green carpet of soft, thick moss. Forgetful of her promise, Grace wandered farther and farther on, gathering the wild flowers as she went. She found plenty of trilliums and violets, and pounced with a cry of delight upon some wild pink honeysuckle just opening. After stripping the bush, she turned into a bypath that led straight up a little hill which rose before her. Scrambling up the hill, Grace reached the top and looked about her. Nestling at the foot of the elevation

on the side opposite to the one she had climbed stood a small one-story cottage.

"How funny," thought Grace. "I didn't know there was a house anywhere near here. I'm going down there for a drink of water. I'm awfully thirsty."

Suiting the action to the words, Grace hurried toward the cottage. As she neared it she noticed that the door was wide open. "Some one is at home, that's certain," she said to herself. "I hope they won't be cross at my asking for a drink. Why," she exclaimed, "there's no one living here at all. I think I'll venture in, perhaps there's a well at the back of the house."

Entering, she found that the cottage consisted of but two rooms. The front one was absolutely bare, but the back one contained an old stove, a broken-down sink and a rickety chair. At one side was a good-sized closet. Opening it, Grace found nothing save a dilapidated old coat. Just then she caught the sound of rough voices just outside the cottage.

"I tell ye, Bill, we've got to do the job tonight and hike for the West on that train that goes through Oakdale at 3.15 in the morning," said a voice that was almost a growl.

"I'm wid yer, Jim," answered another voice in correspondingly savage tones. "Even to layin' a few out stiff if dey gets in de way."

Grace listened. She heard heavy footsteps, and, peeping into the room, she saw a burly figure outlined in the front door in the act of entering. She glanced toward the back door. It was closed and fastened with a bolt. If she could slip out that way, she could make a run for the picnic grounds, but she dared not try to pass the two men who had just appeared. The few words of their conversation proved them to be lawless. Noiselessly she slipped into the closet and drew the door almost shut. She would hide until they had gone. They were not likely to linger long in the cottage.

Minute after minute went by, but the intruders showed no signs of leaving.

"What shall I do?" Grace breathed, wringing her hands. "They're real, downright burglars of the worst sort, and they're planning a robbery. It's getting late, too, and the girls will soon be going back. Oh, I must get out of here, but I won't try to go until I find out whose house they're going to rob."

The men talked on, but, listen as she might, Grace could get no clue.

"There ain't a soul on the joint except the judge and one old servant," growled Bill. "The rest o' the bunch'll be at the weddin' of one o' the girls. I laid low and heard 'em talkin' about it to-day. The judge's got money in the

house, too. He always keeps it around, and that old Putnam place is pretty well back from the road."

Grace waited to hear no more. She had obtained the information she sought. They were going to rob and perhaps murder good old Judge Putnam.

Slipping quietly out of the closet, she approached the back door and cautiously took hold of the bolt. To her joy it moved easily. Exercising the greatest care in sliding it back, she lifted the latch. It made no sound, and, holding her breath, she softly swung open the door and ran on tiptoe around the corner of the house. Throwing away her bouquet as she ran, she made for a clump of underbrush at one side of the cottage. Here she paused, and hearing no disturbance from inside, she continued her flight. But she had lost her sense of direction, and after fifteen minutes' wandering was about to despair of finding her way, when she espied the honeysuckle bush that she had stripped earlier in the afternoon. This put her on the right track, but she was farther away from the picnic grounds than she had supposed, and when tired and breathless she at last reached them, it was only to find them deserted. The party had gone back to town without her.

Grace stood staring about her in blank dis-

may. It was nearing seven o'clock, and she was twelve miles from Oakdale. Why hadn't the girls waited? Grace felt ready to cry, then the vision of the poor old judge, alone and at the mercy of the two ruffians, flashed before her.

"I'll walk to Oakdale," she said, with a determined nod of her head. "And I'll not stop for an instant until I notify the police."

Grace never forgot that lonely walk. The darkness of a moonless night settled down upon her before she had gone three miles, but she would not allow herself to think of fear. She stumbled frequently as she neared her journey's end, and her tired body cried out for rest, but she pushed resolutely on, almost sobbing with relief as she entered the suburbs of the town. It was nearly eleven by the city hall clock when she hurried up the steps of the police station.

"Well, well!" said Chief Burroughs, as Grace rushed unceremoniously into his office. "Here's the lost girl now. I just received word that you were missing. Your father and one of my men left here not five minutes ago. They went to the livery to hire a rig."

"Oh, try and stop them, Mr. Burroughs," cried Grace excitedly. "'Phone the livery and tell them that I'm here. Then listen to me, for I've walked all the way from Forest Park and there's no time to lose."

"Walked from Forest Park?" exclaimed the chief, as he turned to the 'phone. "Why that's a good twelve miles and——"

"I know," interrupted Grace, then was silent, for the chief had begun talking to the livery.

"It's all right," he said, hanging up. "They'll be here directly. Caught them just in the nick of time, however. Now what's on your mind, Grace?"

"They're going to rob old Judge Putnam," Grace burst forth incoherently. "He's all alone. Oh, do send some one out there quickly, or it may be too late. Isn't there a telephone in the judge's house? He ought to be warned."

"Who's going to rob the judge? What are you talking about, my child?" asked the chief. "No, the judge has no 'phone. He thinks them a nuisance."

Grace rapidly told of her adventure in the woods, and her escape from the cottage. Before she had finished Chief Burroughs had begun to act. Summoning three special policemen, he narrated briefly what he had just heard, and five minutes later Grace had the satisfaction of knowing that, fully armed, they were well on their way to the Putnam estate.

"I can't understand why the girls didn't miss me," she said to the chief, as she sat awaiting her father's appearance.

"Miss Bright and Miss O'Malley, who were in the second wagon, thought you were in the first with Miss Pierson and Miss Nesbit, and vice versa," replied the chief. "The second wagon broke down when about half way home. It took over half an hour to get it fixed, so when it did arrive the girls in the head wagon had all gone home. Your mother grew uneasy when ten o'clock came, so she telephoned your friends, and on comparing notes you were found to be among the missing."

"What a mix-up," laughed Grace. "No wonder I wasn't missed. I'm sorry mother was uneasy, but she'll forgive me when she hears my tale. Oh, I hope nothing has happened to the poor old judge."

"Well, we'll soon know," replied the chief. "Now, you just take it easy and rest until your father comes. You need it after a twelve-mile walk. Of all the brave little girls——"

The ringing of the telephone cut the chief short.

Grace gave a long sigh and leaned back in the big chair. She was so tired. Her eyelids drooped——

"Well, I declare!" said the chief, as he turned from the telephone, for Grace was fast asleep.

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

THE special policemen sent out to the Putnam estate were not doomed to disappointment. After an hour's waiting, their patience was rewarded, and the two housebreakers appeared upon the scene. Before they could do any damage they were apprehended and a bag containing a complete outfit of burglar's tools was taken away from them. They fought desperately, but without avail, and were marched to jail to await their hearing.

Judge Putnam was greatly agitated over the affair. He had a large sum of money in the house, not to mention old family silver and other valuables.

"I realize I've had a narrow escape," he exclaimed to the chief the next day. "I might have been murdered in cold blood. I'll have a burglar alarm put in at once and a telephone, too. I had no business to let all the servants except old James go for the night. Who did you say brought the news? Tom Harlowe's little girl? She always was a wide awake youngster. I wonder what I can do for her to show her that I appreciate her bravery?"

"I don't believe she'd accept anything, Judge," replied the chief. "She's not that sort."

"We shall see. We shall see," said the judge, rubbing his hands. "I have a plan I think she'll listen to."

In the meantime, on reaching home Grace had been cried over by her mother and put to bed as though she were a baby. The story had been told by her chums throughout the school the next day, and Grace found herself the "observed of all observers."

"Any of you would have done the same," she said when surrounded by a bevy of admiring schoolmates.

"That's what you always say," exclaimed Nora. "But let me tell you I should have been in hysterics if I had been left alone in the dark twelve miles from nowhere."

Judge Putnam did not at once make his plan known to Grace. He called, thanking her and complimenting her on her bravery and presence of mind.

"I shall have something to ask you when school closes, my dear child," he said as he rose to go. "Something that concerns you and your friends, and you mustn't say 'no' to an old man."

"What on earth does he mean?" said Grace to

her chums, as she repeated the judge's words. "I shall be eaten up with curiosity until school closes."

"Wish to goodness it was over now," growled Nora O'Malley. "I don't believe the last of June will ever come."

The morning after commencement, eight highly excited girls gathered on the Harlowe's veranda. Grace had received a note from Judge Putnam requesting that the Phi Sigma Tau call upon him at ten o'clock that morning.

"Do hurry," said Jessica, as they neared the judge's beautiful home. "The sooner we get there the sooner we'll know."

"Good morning, young ladies," said the judge, bowing with old-time gallantry as James ushered the eight girls into the library. "You look like a garden of roses. There's nothing like youth; nothing like it. Sit down and make yourselves comfortable while I tell you why I asked you to come and see an old man."

"You are just like Mrs. Gray, Judge," said Grace, "always imagining yourself old, when you know your just a great big boy."

"Very pretty, my dear," chuckled the judge. "But if I am as young as you say, then I must do something to keep young. Now, the way I propose doing it is this: I have a camp up in the Adirondacks that needs attention, so I wrote

my youngest sister about it and she agrees with me. She is going up there this week with a couple of servants to open the bungalow and put it in readiness for eight girls who call themselves the Phi Sigma Tau, providing their fathers and mothers can spare them for a few weeks. Do you think they will care to go?"

"Oh-h-h-h! How lovely!" breathed the eight girls in concert.

"Care to go? Well I should say so. It will be the greatest lark ever," cried Grace.

"If you know any young men who can make themselves useful, we might invite them. I don't like the idea of being the only boy, you know."

"David and Tom," said Grace and Anne.

"Hippy can go, I'm sure," said Nora.

"Not to mention Reddy and Arnold Evans," murmured Jessica, with a glance at Miriam.

It looks as though I shall not lack masculine company," remarked the judge, with twinkling eyes. "Tell your parents that my sister will write them."

"I move that we give three cheers and the High School yell for Judge Putnam, and then go straight home and get proper permission," cried Grace.

The cheers were given with a will, and after shaking hands with the judge, the girls said good-bye.

"How did Judge Putnam know about the Phi Sigma Tau; even to its name?" asked Marian Barber curiously.

"Lots of people know of it," remarked Eva Allen.

"Girls," said Grace earnestly, "don't you think our society has been a success so far?"

"Yes, indeed," was the united answer.

"Our sorority has made us fast friends, loyal to each other, through good and evil report," she continued. "Let us resolve now, that during our senior year we will stand firmly together, and make the Phi Sigma Tau represent all that is best and most worthy in High School life."

When next we meet Grace Harlowe and her girl chums, they will have entered upon their senior year at High School. In "Grace Harlowe's Senior Year at High School; Or, The Parting of the Ways," we shall learn how the Phi Sigma Tau kept their sorority pledge. Eleanor Savell will again seek revenge, and Grace Harlowe will once more prove herself equal to the occasion. Those who have followed the "High School Girls" through three years of school life cannot fail to be interested in what befell these lovable everyday girls during their senior year.

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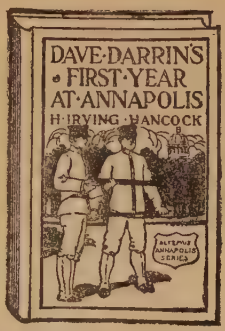

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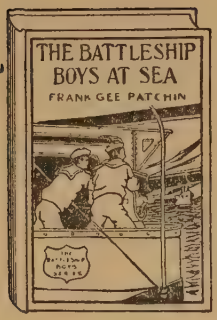

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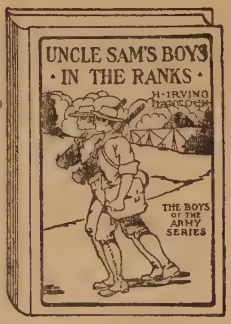

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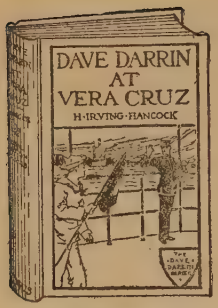

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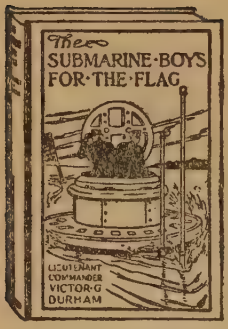

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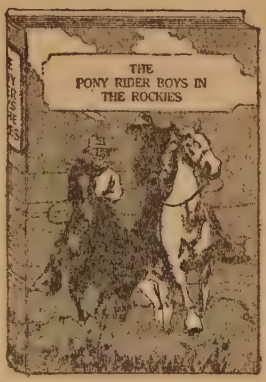

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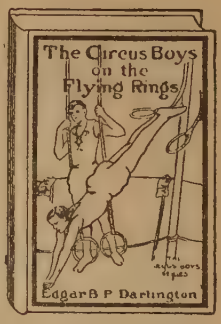

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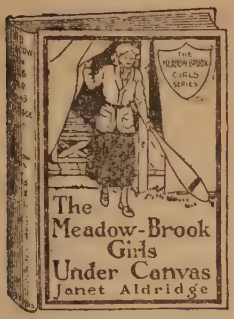

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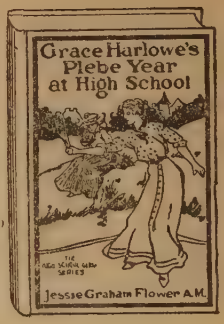

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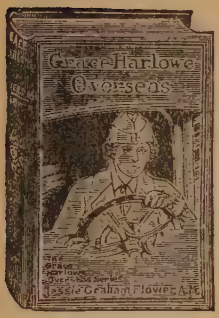

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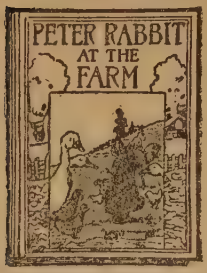

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